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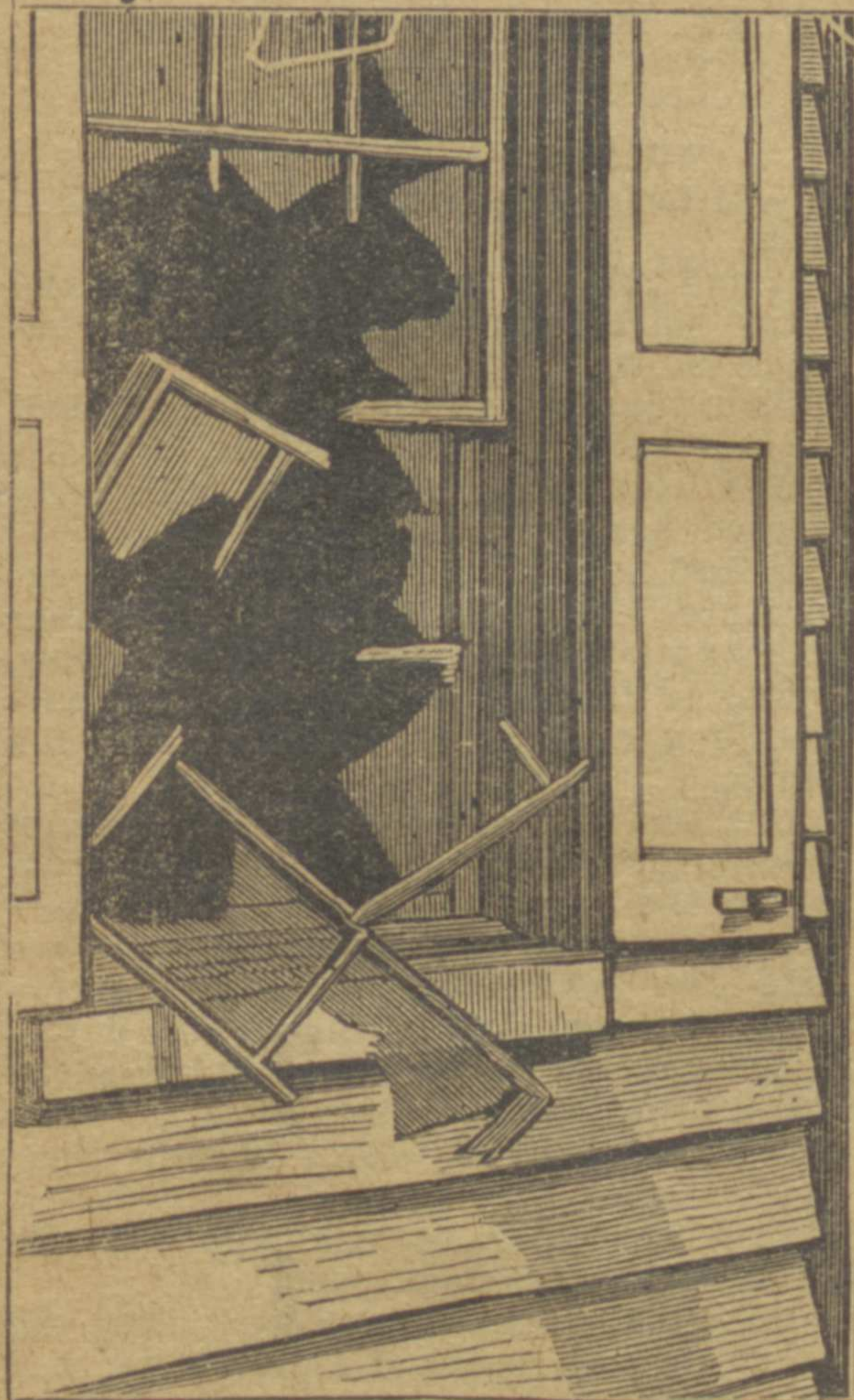
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Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Big Play;



OR,

THE BLUFF GAME AT GOLD LEDGE CITY.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

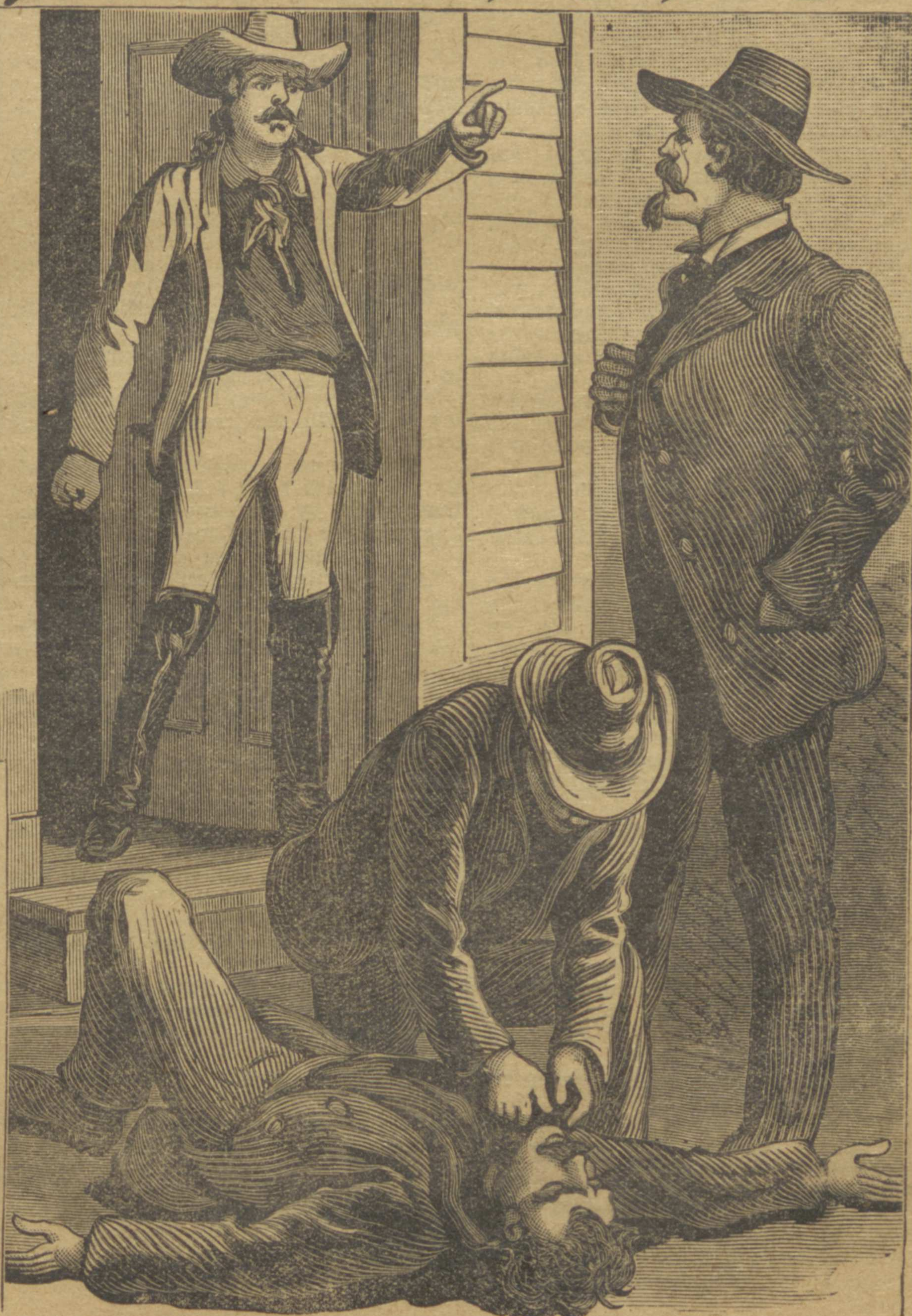
CHAPTER I.

MAKING A PECULIAR DEPOSIT.

A MAN entered the bank hastily, quickly closed the door, and looked furtively out of the nearest window before he spoke.

He was about sixty-five years of age, and was shabbily attired. Under his left arm he carried something wrapped in a dirty-looking cloth and tied with a string.

Seemingly satisfied with the survey, he



"DANIEL MURRAY, YOUR BLUFF GAME ENDS RIGHT HERE!" SAID DEADWOOD DICK.

turned from the window and approached the first opening in the heavy wire netting that separated the interior of the bank from the public room, where he made the hasty inquiry:

"Can I see the president of this bank?"

"He is not in, sir," answered the teller.

"The cashier, then?"

The teller turned from the window and announced:

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Guerdon."

The cashier rose and came forward.

"You want to see me?" closely scrutinizing the caller.

"Yes; I have a valuable deposit to make, if you will accept it. May I come into your private office?"

He looked toward the door as he spoke and craned his neck to take another look from the window, the cashier and teller at the same time exchanging a glance.

"What is the nature of your deposit, sir?" the cashier inquired.

"Immense value, sir," was the response. "Pray do not keep me standing here; I have reason to believe that I am in danger."

"Well, step into the back room there, by that door," indicating, "and I will join you immediately. Help yourself to a chair. I will not keep you waiting."

The old man stepped quickly to the door indicated, opened it, cast one more furtive glance toward the main entrance, and passed into the rear room.

"I don't know what to make of that man," said the cashier to the teller, in a low tone. "It may be a ruse to get at our funds. I will close the doors of the safe, and do you have your revolvers ready for instant use, in case others come in."

"All right, Mr. Guerdon. They will not find the Gold Ledge National asleep. But I do not look for anything of the kind; the old man impressed me as being sincere."

"Yes; I think he is, too; but we cannot afford to take any chances. There, the funds are safe, anyhow. Keep your eyes peeled."

"I'll do that," assured the teller.

The cashier, having closed and locked the big doors of the safe, joined the caller in the rear room.

The old man had taken a seat by the directors' table, and was holding the cloth-wrapped package before him on the table, as if afraid it might get away.

"Now, sir, I am at your service," said the cashier, sitting down.

"My name is Wheaton—Henry Wheaton," the visitor announced.

"Very well, Mr. Wheaton; and you want to make a deposit with us, I believe you said."

"Yes, that is it; but not a deposit in dollars and cents—Wait; I will show you just what it is, and explain."

So saying, he untied the string, opened the folds of the cloth, and disclosed a silver casket, old and tarnished, which he lifted up and set forward on the table.

"There, you see it," he said, simply.

"You want to leave that in our keeping, then?"

"That is the idea."

"But, we do not do a safe-deposit business, my good man."

"You must not refuse me, for it is a very serious matter. This box is no longer safe in my possession."

"You say it is valuable?"

"It is invaluable, sir, invaluable."

"All the more reason, then, why we should not undertake its custody."

"That is to say," the old gentleman

hastened to modify, "it is invaluable to the owner. You must accept it, sir."

"But we could not undertake to guarantee you against its loss, in the event of burglary. You must assume all that risk, for we will not be responsible in any degree."

"Of course not; of course not. I do not expect that. All I want is to put the casket in a safe place for the time being, and I am willing to pay you for the privilege. It is no longer safe in my hands; I must not carry it out of this room."

"Some one is seeking to take it from you, then?"

"Yes, yes; that is it."

"Did that person see you enter here with it?"

"No; I am satisfied that no one saw me come in. I took the best of care to elude them."

"And how long do you want us to keep it for you?"

"I may come for it in a short time; I may have to leave it with you for a year or longer."

"And it is distinctly understood that we assume no responsibility in accepting it? We merely do it as a favor to you, under the circumstances?"

"That is understood. Nevertheless, I am willing to pay you liberally for the service—"

"No, no; I can take nothing. It is merely a favor, and even that is more than I feel justified in granting to a stranger. In fact, I would not do it, were it not as you describe."

"Then, accept my thanks for the favor. There it is," pushing the box further along on the table. "I leave it in your keeping. All I ask is your word that you will put it immediately into your most private safe, where it will be little seen and can awaken no curiosity."

"I will put it away immediately, Mr. Wheaton."

"Wait! In the event that I am unable to come for it myself—"

"Ah! True enough! The person calling for it will require some written authority—"

"And it must be such as you can readily distinguish from a forgery; for even that might be attempted if it became known where I had deposited the casket."

"Then, what do you suggest?"

"One minute, and I will write the order in your presence."

There were pens, ink and paper on the table, of which the old man proceeded to make use.

"There," he said, when he had written something; "read that. That is plain enough, is it not?"

"That is right to the point," Mr. Wheaton.

He handed it back again.

"And now I tear it in two, thus," said the caller. "The one-half I will retain; the other half we will paste to the bottom of the silver casket. You have mucilage?"

"I see only one objection to the plan, Mr. Wheaton."

"And what is that?"

"You intend to carry this piece of paper on your person?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, is it not equivalent to carrying the casket with you? The paper may be stolen from you and presented."

"How will the person know where to present it? Just read the half of the order that I will retain, and you will see that it will be impossible for him to find it."

The cashier took the slip and read as follows:

"The Cashier of the National Bank will deliver to the bearer the silver safe keeping."

HEN

"You are right," the cashier agreed. "You carry the secret in your head, and no one but the person to whom you impart it can possibly supply what is wanting here. Very well, Mr. Wheaton; I think this will answer the purpose."

"And you will paste the other half on the box?"

"At once."

He arose and procured a bottle of mucilage, and it took but a moment to complete the requirement.

The cashier noticed, as he handled the casket, that it was heavy, and also that, whatever it contained, it was securely packed, since nothing could be heard or felt to move.

As he put the casket down an inscription on the top caught his eye.

He had not noticed it before, the engraving being quite fine, and the casket tarnished as described.

Holding it slantwise, so that the light fell across it, the owner offering no objection, the cashier read as follows:

"Curst be the hand that breaks the seal and makes the secret known."

CHAPTER II.

WHAT DID MURRAY KNOW?

Gold Ledge City was a well-established town.

It had two newspapers, two banks, and many solid business institutions of various kinds.

Beginning as a mining-camp, it had been a success from the first, and, its mines continuing good, its prosperity seemed assured and lasting.

It had now reached a point in its experience where, taking away the mines that had made it, it must thrive anyhow, owing to the fine character of the surrounding country of which it was the center.

But, the mines were still there, chief among them being the Gold Ledge, from which the camp had derived its name—the name that still clung to the place long after the outgrowth of almost everything that smacked of the former days.

True, it was in the West, and Western ways prevailed; but the town, usually, was as staid as any town in New England.

The Gold Ledge National was the older of the two banks mentioned.

Daniel Murray, its president, was the head, also, of the Gold Ledge Mine, and was, perhaps, the most prominent man in the town. His son, James, occupied the post of superintendent of the mine. Daniel was about forty-eight years of age, his son twenty-six, and they were as much alike as father and son can be.

About the time when Henry Wheaton was in conversation with William Guerdon, the cashier, at the bank, the Murrys, father and son, were similarly engaged in the office of the mine, behind closed doors. That something was amiss was evident, for both were scowling.

"Well, what is going to be done about it?" the son demanded.

"Only one thing can be done," was the response. "Need I mention what that is?"

"No, if you mean the same remedy that was applied before. But, that is a dangerous business and one I do not like. What if discovery comes before we can clear our heels?"

"Well, let it come if it must. The

blame will not fall upon us; we are too shrewd for that, I hope."

"When must it be done?"

"To-night."

"Yes, for we must make our deposit to-morrow against pay-day the day after, as usual. Well, say no more about it; we understand each other."

"The sale will take place next week, if I can bring it around, and that will clear up the whole business."

"Unless they bring with them experts who will see through it."

"We must take care of them, if so."

"How?"

"Salt is plentiful—"

"Ah! I understand. Well, if that will work, all right."

And, parting, Murray the father set off in the direction of the bank.

It was usual with him to drop in frequently during the day, though he seldom remained long at a time, save when business kept him there. The cashier "ran" the bank.

Murray was a large man, always well dressed, and wore a mustache, and a goatee after the Buffalo Bill order. He had heavy brows, a nose not so straight as would indicate integrity of character yet which denoted the man of much force of character.

He nodded to the teller as he entered.

"How is everything, Coleman?"

"Lovely," was the response.

"Mr. Guerdon in?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a little door in the partition that opened with a spring, the secret of which was supposed to be known to none save the bank officials and employees.

Mr. Murray entered the bank proper by means of this little door, nodded to the two or three clerks, and crossed over to where the cashier was seated at his desk. Murray's own desk occupied a prominent position, but was nearly always covered.

"You are a little too late, Mr. Murray," said the cashier, looking up from some work he was doing.

"Too late?" and the president looked at the cashier in a wondering way.

"Yes; you might have met a new depositor."

"A new depositor?"

Murray's interest was awakened immediately.

"He was a queer customer," explained the cashier. "I hardly knew whether to accept his deposit or not. I wish you had been here."

"How much did he deposit?"

"I should not have used that word. He did not deposit, really, but made us the custodians of a peculiar box which he claimed was invaluable."

"Then you are doing a safe-deposit business as a side issue, eh?" and Murray laughed lightly.

"I thought of refusing it, but he seemed so thoroughly in earnest that I decided to humor him. Of course, we assumed no responsibility in the matter. Would not have thought it worth mentioning to you at all, only that I want to show you the queer old box."

The cashier rose and stepped to the safe, and opening one of the inner doors, took out the silver casket, wrapped as it had been when first carried into the bank.

He untied the string and unfolded the cloth, precisely as the owner had done, and exposed the casket to view.

At sight of it, the bank president gave a start and turned pale.

"My God!" he gasped. "It is fate!"

The cashier dropped the cloth and looked at him in great amazement.

They were some distance removed

from the teller and the others, and Murray looked in their direction while Guerdon looked at him.

As the words had been uttered, in low tone, they had not drawn attention, and Murray pulled up a chair and sat down, taking care to speak in still lower tone.

"Where is the man?" he asked.

"Gone," answered Guerdon.

"Yes, I know, but which way did he go?"

"He insisted on my letting him out the rear way; said he was in danger and must not be seen."

"It is no use my trying to deceive you, after the words you heard me utter," said Murray. "I have seen this box before. But, on your life, Guerdon, do not mention the fact."

"Certainly not, if you wish it so."

"Nor can I explain to you. I say again, it is fate."

"Then you knew Henry Wheaton?"

"Ha! he made use of his real name, did he? I wonder if it can be possible—But, no, too many years have elapsed. Merely coincidence."

"You have greatly awakened my curiosity, Mr. Murray, but I do not ask you to explain, of course. Where I thought I was going to arouse your curiosity, you have turned the tables."

"It is something I cannot disclose, Guerdon. Again let me impress you with the necessity of silence. When is he to come for it?"

"That is uncertain. He said perhaps in a short time; maybe not in a year or more."

"And his object in leaving it here, you said—"

"Was because he believed that he was being watched and was in danger of losing it."

"Ha! then he has given us something to care for that may tempt desperate men to try to get into our safes, eh? I do not like this, Guerdon."

"I'm sorry I accepted it, Mr. Murray; but to tell the truth I pitied the old man—"

"We'll keep it for him, since you did take it."

CHAPTER III.

THE FATE OF HENRY WHEATON.

In the cool of the early morning, a lone horseman was picking his way down through a narrow mountain gulch.

Not more than thirty years of age, he was a good-looking, fearless man with dark hair that fell in a mass upon his shoulders, a dark mustache, and keen, magnetic dark eyes.

He was mounted upon a horse as black as coal, a clean-limbed, intelligent-looking animal that seemed to have imbibed some of its master's alertness and intrepidity. Its neck was arched proudly, and it stepped with a dainty lightness indicative of speed.

The rider was sitting his saddle with an easy, careless and unconscious grace, evidently buried in thought.

The horse was choosing its own footing.

Of a sudden the intelligent beast lifted its head higher and gave a low whinny.

"What is it, Eagle?" the rider asked, rousing from his reverie and taking a swift survey around. "What do you hear?"

The whinny was repeated.

"Some one is near us, eh? Well, don't be alarmed. It may be a friend; but if not—Well, we have faced foes before, Eagle, and we will no doubt have to face them many times more."

The horse came to a stop, ears pointed forward and nostrils distended.

"What is it Eagle?" demanded the rider, in low tones, at the same time drawing a gun from its holster at his hip. "It is something more than usual. Go on!"

Instead of obeying, the horse recoiled and betrayed something like a tremor of fear.

"This is passing strange," the man said to himself. "I must investigate. Be quiet, pet; nothing shall harm you."

Gun in hand, the rider slipped from the saddle and went ahead a few paces—but a few—when he discovered what had caused his horse its alarm.

It was the body of a man.

Lying beside the trail, close in under a ledge of overhanging rock, he had been unable to see it, from his first position.

The face was partly turned from him, but by the hair and beard he knew it was a man well on in years. And as he looked upon it he was startled to hear a slight moan.

"Hello!" he exclaimed to himself.

"Alive, after all! Overtaken by robbers, no doubt, and left by the wayside for dead. I must do the Good Samaritan act, as my name is Deadwood Dick!"

He had shoved his gun into its holster, while speaking, and now stooping, laid hold upon the man and drew him out into the full light.

The man moaned again, as he was moved.

He was apparently sixty-five years of age, shabbily attired, and had been severely wounded.

There was a dark mark across one corner of his forehead, showing where he had been struck with some weapon, and the front of his shirt was stained with blood.

Dick tore open the shirt and discovered no less than three knife-cuts, and he wondered that a spark of life remained.

But he knew that death was near.

Taking a flask from his pocket, he applied it to the man's lips, and then began rubbing his cold hands.

The horse had followed its master forward, and, after sniffing at the wounded man, uttered another whinny, low and plaintive, as if in pity, and rubbed its nose affectionately upon its master's shoulder.

"Yes, it is too bad, Eagle, that's the fact," said Deadwood Dick. "If he can only rouse up enough to give us a clue, we'll attend to the scoundrel who did the deed, I promise you. But I am afraid he is past all return to consciousness—Ah!"

There was a fluttering of the eyelids, and the man opened his eyes.

Dick applied the flask to his lips once more, and rubbed the cold and benumbed hands more briskly still.

The eyes had closed again immediately, but breathing was not to be recognized, and the bleeding from the wounds was started afresh—which Dick tried to stanch.

He tore some bits from the man's shirt and forced them into the wounds.

The dying man moaned, under this, and opened his eyes again.

Dick spoke to him.

"Are you conscious?" he inquired.

The man moved his head to signify that he was.

"Try to speak," Dick urged. "Tell me who did this, and as my name is Deadwood Dick—"

"D—D—"

The man had given a start, and was trying to say something.

He was looking at Dick with eyes open wide, eyes that were becoming set with the glaze of death.

"Yes, I am Deadwood Dick," said Dick, guessing that it was his name the man tried to repeat. "Give me a clew to your murderer, and I will hunt him down."

The man made an effort to use his hands, but they fluttered only and were not obedient to his will.

"What is it?" Dick asked. "Just his name, if no more."

The dying man was drawing his face and moving his tongue, trying to bring moisture to his lips.

Dick Bristol saw what was wanted; on the other side of the trail ran a little rivulet, to which he sprang and scooped up some of the water with his hands.

This he trickled into the man's mouth, and bringing more, bathed his face and forehead.

"My—my fortune, my—my heirs," the man feebly panted.

"They murdered you?"

The eyes closed, and for a moment there was no movement to indicate that life remained.

Then he shook his head in the negative, very feebly indeed, and again opened his eyes.

"If there is something important you would make known, say it quickly, old man," urged Dick, bending over him kindly. "I fear your minutes are numbered."

"M—my fortune—my heirs—they—"

Dick did not believe he would be able to get the clew he desired.

The life was rapidly going out, he could see that, and the man was wasting his little remaining breath.

"Give me the name of your murderer," Dick urged.

"No! no!"

He not only spoke, but shook his head negatively, in response to that request.

"You will not tell?"

Another negative.

"Then what can I do for you? What is your dying request? You want to do something with your hands?"

All this time the hands had been moving about, feebly fluttering this way and that, and Dick took hold of one and attempted to guide it, and not without success.

The hand sought the inside of the coat the old man wore, where the fingers made effort to perform some duty required of them by the will, but without being able to do their part, and Dick pulled the coat open wide and made an examination.

A hole in the lining, one having the appearance of having been cut there purposely, caught his eye, and he thrust his fingers into it. There he felt a bit of paper, which he drew forth, and the moment he did so the man allowed his hands to drop heavily and a sigh escaped him. The paper was this:

The Cashier of the
National Bank will
the bearer the safe
keeping.

HEN

CHAPTER IV.

SOME ADDITIONAL POINTS.

Deadwood Dick read the paper at a glance.

That is to say he read the words; he was far from knowing what they meant.

He knew that only half of the paper was there, and he felt in the same place for the other half, but there was no more, of course.

"This is all?" he asked.

The man nodded.

"And what am I to do with it?"

"F—find Hor—Horace—"

His breath seemed gone. Dick believed that he would not be able to gather enough of a clew to be of use to him.

"The name, simply the name," he urged.

A moment's pause.

The man then opened his eyes, now almost sightless, and, as if realizing that this would be his last effort, made it supreme.

Dick saw him gathering all his strength, and listened closely and keenly to catch whatever might be spoken, at the same time watching intently in order that even the forming of the lips might aid him.

"Find Horace Jeffries," the man spoke. "Give him the—the paper. All—my for—fortune—his. N—not a cent—to—any—other."

"Horace Jeffries," Dick repeated. "Where is he to be found?"

There was a pause, while the man fought for another breath. Would he be able to speak again?

Dick doubted it.

"The place?" Dick urged.

The man made an effort, but failed.

"One thing more, just another name," Dick tried to insist. "Give me the name of the man who killed you."

To that, only a negative shake of the head.

Dick had to believe that the man knew his slayer, who he was, but was determined to shield him.

"This Horace Jeffries," he hastened. "You see I do not forget the name. Tell me where to find him—where to get trace of him—and your dying wish shall be filled."

Yet another effort did the dying man make, and Dick knew it would be the last.

His lips parted, he strained, but no sound came forth.

He seemed to remain for an age thus, so painful was the moment, and then his breast sank and his last breath was gone!

Dick rose up.

"Well, it is all over with him," he said, as he looked sadly on the remains. "I wonder who he was, where he was from, where he was going? And he spoke of a fortune—His looks give the lie to that, and yet—"

Dick finished by looking at the slip of paper he held in his fingers.

"Not a clew," he said to himself, "save this and a name. I like to take hold of knots of this kind, however, and I shall make it my business to try to solve the mystery."

He remained in a thoughtful mood.

"Something strange," he mused. "This paper has not been carried on his person long; it is as new and clean as if written only yesterday. And why has it been cut in half? I give it up. Here is a poser for you, Richard Bristol, sure enough."

Putting the slip of paper away in an inner pocket, he proceeded to examine the body further.

He searched every pocket, but found not a scrap of anything further to aid him in the work. The pockets were empty, containing not even a button.

"No use, Eagle," he said, addressing his patient horse, standing by all this time.

Dick looked around for a place to bury the body.

There was no place; it was rock and nothing but rock everywhere.

Seeing he could do no better, he re-

turned the body to the spot where first discovered, and there placing stones around it, went on his way.

An hour later, he rode into a camp called Hustleville.

Here he put up his horse and ordered breakfast and began his first inquiries.

"Did you see anything of an old man passing through this way yesterday, going in the direction of Grub Stake?" he asked the landlord of the "shebang" where he stopped.

"Shabby-lookin' cuss, with gray hair and whiskers?" the landlord inquired.

"Yes."

"Such a man as that took supper hyer last night."

"So? Did you learn anything about him?"

"Not much; he was a wary customer."

"In what respect?"

"Why, he was on the watch all the time, as if he expected some one to slip up and dig him with a knife."

"And what did you learn about him?"

Dick pressed, at the same time appearing to have no more than passing interest in the matter. "Did you find out where he was going?"

"He let drop that he had come from Gold Ledge City, and that he was heading for Montana."

"Don't suppose he mentioned any particular place, eh?"

"He did, though; he mentioned Helena. Don't know whether his home was there or not, but there's where he was going."

"That all you know?"

"That's all, sir. Now, what was he to you? Why have ye asked me so many questions?"

"Another question or two, and then I will answer yours and explain the situation. You said he appeared to be watching for a foe, or on his guard all the time?"

"That's jist how he acted."

"Well, did you see any one following him?"

"Not a soul, sir."

"Did any one set out on the same trail after he had gone?"

"Why, there is more or less travel on that trail; didn't notice any one in p'ticular."

"Well, now I'll tell you what's up. I did not know any such person, but I found the man dying in the gulch about six miles to the north of here—"

"Dying?"

"Yes; dying of several knife wounds."

"Ha! then he wasn't alarmed fer nothin'; some one was stalkin' his trail, sure enough."

"The evidence points in that direction, that's true, and it looks as if the murderer will get away, unless—"

"Unless what?" as Dick paused.

"Well, unless your authorities are smart enough to find him out and run him down."

"Then he died?"

"Yes; died just after I discovered him."

"Didn't he speak? Hadn't he any thing to say? Didn't he tell who done it?"

"No, I could not get that out of him. He said but little, and that only in gasps. I left the body lying where I found him, and thought I would report it at the first place I came to."

"And where are you goin'?"

"I am heading for Gold Ledge City."

"Then you had better report it there. We'll send out and fetch in the body, and the coroner kin ride over and set on et ef he wants to. The chances is he'll fetch you with him fer a witness. Et is a good

while sence a murder has been done hyerabouts."

"I am willing to do everything in my power toward clearing up the matter, of course," said Dick.

Conversation ran on, while Dick ate his breakfast and smoked a cigar after it; Dick trying to draw out something that would serve as a clue, but failing. Finally, having inquired the distance, he set out for Gold Ledge City.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERY OF A MURDER.

Gold Ledge was aflame with excitement.

George Coleman, teller of the Gold Ledge National, on opening the bank that morning, had made a fearful discovery.

The big safes were open, completely looted—as further investigation proved; but, worse than that, on the floor in front of the safe lay the cashier, dead, in a pool of blood.

Coleman was overcome; but, recovering from the shock, he ran out into the street and gave the alarm.

The news spread, and in a few minutes there was a great crowd in front of the bank.

Questions innumerable were fired at the teller while he stood on the steps awaiting the arrival of Mr. Murray, and he was glad when the president was seen coming.

Daniel Murray and his son together came running from the direction of the Murray residence, and reached the bank nearly out of breath.

Deadwood Dick, just arrived, drew up about the same moment.

"What is this?" cried Murray. "Guerdon dead?"

At mention of the name, Deadwood Dick gave a start, but no one noted it.

"Yes, sir," said the teller, and briefly told his story.

"This is frightful," said Murray. "James get hold of the sheriff and the coroner as quick as you can, and bring them here. We must do everything possible to discover who has done this thing."

The son started off, while the elder mounted the steps.

"Do I understand that Mr. William Guerdon has been killed?" inquired Deadwood Dick.

Instantly every eye was turned upon him.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded Murray.

"My name is Bristol."

"And you knew Guerdon?"

"Through some correspondence with him—yes."

"Yes, William Guerdon has been murdered; and I want to say that it will go hard with his slayer, if we can get hold of him."

"It generally does go hard with a murderer, when he is caught," said Dick. "This is a great and painful surprise for me, for I came here to keep an appointment with Mr. Guerdon to-day."

"What business had you with him, sir?"

"Well, not knowing who you are, I must decline to answer your question."

"I would have you know that I am president of this bank, and anything that concerned poor Guerdon concerns me. My name is Daniel Murray."

"Glad to know you, sir, and shall be happy to explain later, in private. The matter is one that certainly cannot concern the whole crowd, you will admit."

"True, true. I did not stop to think of that."

"And if I can be of any use to you in trying to solve the mystery of this murder, you have only to command me."

"Who and what are you, then?"

"If I can get some one to take my horse, Mr. Murray, I will join you and explain."

"Certainly; any of the boys will stable your black for you."

"I'm yer man, boss."

A fellow stepped forward and took hold of the bridle, and Dick, dismounting, pressed a coin into his hand and gave him some brief instructions, after which he joined Mr. Murray.

"I did not think it just the thing to call out my business before all the crowd, Mr. Murray," he said. "The fact of the matter is, I am a detective."

The president started slightly.

"A detective?"

"Yes, sir; and at your service in this matter."

"And you said your name was—"

"Bristol—Richard M. Bristol, better known as Deadwood Dick, Junior."

Mr. Murray gave even more of a start than before, and his face went suddenly pale for the moment.

"Deadwood Dick!" he exclaimed. And then immediately: "How fortunate for us! You are the very man of all others we need here now. Give me your hand. A glad surprise, I assure you."

He shook hands heartily.

"Have you any idea who did this deed?" Dick asked.

"Not the slightest; it has just been discovered, you know. Let's go in."

"And you had better station some one here at the doors to keep back the crowd," Dick advised. "The fewer the better, while we look around."

"Here, Hurley, you will do for that," Mr. Murray called out; "take your place here at the door and let no one enter for the present, except the sheriff and the coroner when they come."

The man—a deputy sheriff, by the way—a big, strong fellow, pushed out of the crowd and took his place at the door, and Murray led Dick into the bank by means of the small door in the partition, followed by the teller, who closed the door after them.

There lay the cashier, about as the teller had described.

He was lying on his face, both arms outstretched, his life blood in a pool around him.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Murray, stopping short. "This is horrible! And you say the safe has been emptied, Coleman?"

"Yes, sir; of all the cash," said the teller.

"And you found it open?"

"Everything is just as I found it, sir. I did not touch a thing, but ran right out and gave the alarm."

"Did you discover it as soon as you came in?" asked Dick.

"Just as soon as I looked this way, after letting the shades down from the windows, sir."

"You always open the bank?"

"Either Mr. Guerdon or I."

"Were you early or late this morning?"

"About on my usual time."

"Did you expect to find Mr. Guerdon here?"

"I did not think about him, sir, till I saw him lying there."

"Was the door locked when you let yourself in? That is, did you find it as usual?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you say you did not touch a thing?"

"Not a thing; you see it now just as I saw it—I merely stepped to the safe and looked in and saw the money was gone."

"It looks like a plain case of robbery and murder, does it not?" suggested Mr. Murray.

"Yes, it certainly does," agreed Dick.

"But what was Mr. Guerdon doing here?" questioned the teller.

"That is so—what was he doing here?" repeated Mr. Murray. "Never knew he visited the bank at night."

"The whole mystery seems to deepen, even before we begin," said Dick. "Let us see how he met his death; that may throw some light upon the case. Will you lend a hand?"

He stooped to lift the body, with a motion to Coleman.

The teller took hold of the feet, while Dick took hold of the shoulders, and, lifting the dead man out of the pool of blood, they laid him on his back.

There was a bullet hole through the shirt front, and the shirt was burst and blackened, showing plainly that the shot had been fired at close range. They looked for a weapon, but found none, or it might have been taken for a case of suicide.

Deadwood Dick looked around critically.

Some books were lying in a disordered heap on the floor near at hand, and a chair was overturned.

It looked as if a struggle, perhaps of short duration, had been going on, and these appearances pointed to the fact that the cashier must have been shot during that struggle.

That would account for the close range.

These things Dick noticed, while he stood silent for a few moments, and he communicated the facts to Mr. Murray while they looked further for some solution to the enigma.

CHAPTER VI.

DOUBLES THE MYSTERY.

Dick had about completed his investigation when James Murray returned, with the sheriff and coroner.

The sheriff was a big, hearty-looking man, with a full face and close-cropped beard, whose keen eyes seemed to take in everything at a glance. His name was Joe Crossen.

The coroner was a smaller man, and older, by the name of Hammond. He looked greatly distressed, and gazed sorrowfully at the dead cashier for some minutes. Deadwood Dick was introduced to these and to the president's son, who gave a start at mention of the name.

Sheriff Crossen and the coroner accepted the statements made by Dick and Mr. Murray, while they looked around the room on their own account.

"You find no way open?" the sheriff demanded.

"No way at all," said Dick.

"Every door and window is properly secured," said Mr. Murray.

"Then it is plain that the one who came in here must have had a key to the door," said Crossen.

"Plain enough," agreed the president, "and poor Guerdon is the man. I have been thinking, and two ideas have suggested themselves to my mind while standing here."

"What are they?" asked the sheriff.

"One is, that Guerdon came in here for some purpose, after hours, and was followed; the other, that he was forced to

come here and open the safes at the point of a gun."

"There is one thing in the way of the latter view of it," quietly said Deadwood Dick.

"What is it?" asked Crossen.

"The fact that he is found here dead. Had he done that, it would have been to save his life."

"Well, that's so, I guess," agreed Murray.

Father and son looked at each other when chance offered.

"And what of the other theory?" asked the sheriff.

"It is more reasonable," said Dick.

"But there is the question, what brought Guerdon here after hours?" said Mr. Murray. "I tell you, we are trying to see without a light, gentlemen."

"By the way, who, besides the cashier, knew the combination of the safe and how to open it?" inquired Dick.

"I am the only other person, sir," said Murray.

"Then we are sure that it was Mr. Guerdon who opened it, at any rate. The question is, why did he do it?"

"There is the riddle."

"And it is one that I shall undertake to solve," said Dick. "Working together, we ought to accomplish something, Mr. Murray."

"Yes, decidedly. And that reminds me, you said that your business here was to see Mr. Guerdon. In fact, I believe you said you had an appointment with him."

"You have it right."

"Suppose we step into the back room, while the coroner takes hold of the matter."

"Very well. And that reminds me of something else. There is another case for your coroner over at Hustleville."

"At Hustleville? What has been going on over there?"

They all looked at Dick with interest, to hear what further deed of violence had been done.

"Why, as I was on my way from Grub Stake this morning, I came upon the body of an old man—rather, upon an old man, for he was not yet dead—who had been stabbed with a knife three times. He died a few minutes after I found him. I notified the people of Hustleville, and they, in turn, asked me to inform the coroner when I got here."

"Well, that case will have to wait now till this one is disposed of," said Mr. Hammond.

"Did you learn the man's name?" asked Mr. Murray.

"No; but I did learn at Hustleville that he took supper there last night. He stated that he had come from Gold Ledge and was on his way to Montana. Possibly one of your citizens here."

"You say he was old?" asked Murray.

"About sixty-five, I would say."

"Describe him."

Dick did so.

"Why, it must be the old man who came in here yesterday to see Mr. Guerdon," spoke up Teller Coleman.

Deadwood Dick's interest was awakened in that direction in an instant, and he asked:

"Such a man came here to see Mr. Guerdon?"

"Yes, sir. Or, to be exact, he asked for the president first, but as he was not in, asked next for the cashier."

"I had not thought of that," said Mr. Murray, in a thoughtful mood. "I think we are coming at the mystery of poor Guerdon's death sooner than we believed possible."

"Then you know the man—or knew him?" said Dick.

"No; but he was here yesterday, if the same one, and had a peculiar request to make of Mr. Guerdon. Come, let's step into the back room, and I will tell you all about it."

He led the way, Dick following him, and the coroner took hold of the business he had in hand.

"Sit down," Mr. Murray invited. "We must talk this matter over and to a finish."

"A finish must be reached, somehow," agreed Dick.

They took seats by the table, and Mr. Murray lowered his voice when he spoke again.

"You said you came here to meet Guerdon?"

"Yes."

"You had been in correspondence with him, then?"

"I received two letters from him; one asking my private address, and the other bidding me come here for a private interview."

"But, the business; what was the nature of the business?"

"Is it possible that you do not know?"

"I certainly do not know."

"Then we are at sea, for neither do I know. I supposed, of course, it must be known to you."

"It must have been something of a private nature, I take it. It certainly cannot have been anything concerning the bank, or I would have known of it. In fact, I would have been the one to move in the matter."

"It must be as you say," agreed Dick.

"That looks reasonable."

"It is reasonable."

"Well, do you know of anything in Mr. Guerdon's private matters in which he would need a detective?"

"Not a thing, sir; it is a mystery to me."

"A man of family?"

"He had a wife—I pity her, when she hears of this."

"I must see her, after a while. She may be able to enlighten me in regard to it."

"Perhaps."

"And now the other matter. You said you believed that we were coming at the mystery of your cashier's death sooner than we thought."

"Ah! true; there is something not to be omitted. I must tell you about the deposit that old man made here yesterday—taking for granted that it was the same one. I did not see him myself."

"Mr. Coleman appeared to recognize the description."

"Yes. Well, he came here yesterday, rather excited, Guerdon said—or, if not excited, then very apprehensive. He believed that foes were after him, to take from him something of value which he possessed, and that thing he forced the cashier to accept on deposit."

"What was it?"

"A silver box, an old, odd-looking affair, which he said was invaluable to the owner. He said the ones who desired to wrest it from him were hounding him, and he would not dare to carry it any further. And so he left it; and now the question is, did the men who were after it discover that he had left it here and enter the bank to secure it?"

"It would look more as if they had killed the old man, thinking he still had it in his possession."

"Or had first made him disclose where he had left it."

"You may be right."

CHAPTER VII.

WAS IT THE KEY?

It was a knotty problem.

At the end of an hour they were no nearer its solution than when they had begun the discussion.

There were two or three great points of mystery upon which they could seem to get no light whatever, and around which all the minor points centred.

Deadwood Dick had now heard all that Mr. Murray could tell him regarding Henry Wheaton and his mysterious box, as it had been made known to him by the now dead cashier, and the mystery seemed to centre right there.

And then the two mysterious murders that had been committed on the same night, yet so widely apart—that of Henry Wheaton and Cashier Guerdon. Concerning the identity of the former, Mr. Murray was yet uncertain, but there was no doubt in the mind of Deadwood Dick.

He had the proof of it in the fragment of paper with its mysterious wording—mysterious then, at the time of the discovery, but so no longer, in the additional light.

But the crimes committed so widely apart; was there any connection between the two deeds? That was a question.

It was one Deadwood Dick could not yet answer.

Finally, the two men rose from their chairs to rejoin the others in the outer room.

It seemed useless to discuss the matter further; they would await the result of the inquest, and see if any new points would be brought to light.

"One thing more," said Dick, as they stepped toward the door.

"Yes, and one thing more to you," said Mr. Murray. "I want you to go into this case with a determination to solve it."

"That is the way I always take hold," said Dick. "And, I think I may say it without egotism, I have but few failures scored up against me. Something of the bulldog about me—I hang on."

The other smiled.

"Well, hang on here till you clear it up," he said. "And now what were you going to say?"

"I was going to suggest, now that we are returning to the scene of the crime, that you see if the silver casket is missing."

The president started.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I never once thought of that. Strange, now, wasn't it?"

Dick, in his own mind, had been considering that it was strange indeed. He had been waiting for Mr. Murray to suggest it, or make mention of it in some way.

"We have been talking of something besides, as well," Dick passed it over.

"Yes; that must have kept it out of my mind."

They were now in the bank proper, and the president turned to the safe in which the silver casket had rested.

Kneeling down, just within the big outer doors, he took hold of the knob of a smaller one in the interior and pulled, and it came open to his touch, showing that it was not locked.

"Ha!" he exclaimed.

"What?" asked Dick.

"The door—it was not locked."

"And the box?"

"Gone!"

The president rose up, looking questioningly at Dick.

"What do you think now?" he demanded. "Does it not look as if that box was the thing sought?"

"It looks that way, certainly, taking that view of it," Dick agreed.

Whether he really thought so or not, Murray, of course, could not know; but he had no reason to doubt.

Just then the teller called the president's attention.

He had a paper in his hand.

"What is it?" the president asked.

"Writing in Mr. Guerdon's hand," was the answer.

Deadwood Dick stepped immediately forward to see what it was.

It was a sheet of the bank's notehead paper, and the writing was in big, nervous characters.

It contained only a few words, as follows:

"My Dear Inez:—

"I now know all. When you receive this—"

There it ended abruptly, as if it was a beginning that had not suited the writer and he had crumpled the paper and thrown it away to begin again.

A theory was beginning to frame itself in Deadwood Dick's mind, but as yet it was only vague. It lacked some essential points to make it perfect, and without which the whole structure must fall.

"Who is Inez?" he inquired.

"His wife," said Mr. Murray.

"And what do you make of this?"

"I know not what to think of it. I must leave it for you to work out, if you think it a clue."

"It may be a clue, and it may not; that remains to be seen. It only confirms me in my intention of seeing Mrs. Guerdon as soon as possible. Where was this, Mr. Coleman?"

"In the waste-paper basket at the end of the desk."

"How came you to find it?"

"The thought came to me to look there and see if there might not be a scrap of something that would help the coroner."

"It was a good thought. Did you look further?"

"Yes. But found nothing more."

"Shall I take the writing, Mr. Murray?" Dick asked.

"Yes, take it; we look to you to solve the mystery, and want to aid you in every way possible."

"You know it is Guerdon's writing?"

"There can be no mistake about that, sir."

"Very well," and Dick folded the paper and put it into his pocket. "I will see what can be made of it."

"I believe you have framed a theory, sir."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"Well, you may not be wrong."

Mr. Murray stepped up nearer and spoke in a low tone.

"The wording of this message has given you the clue. You believe there was something between Guerdon and his wife."

"That looks so plain, on the surface, that a blind man could hardly be excused for not seeing it," Dick remarked.

"And you believe that is what you were wanted for?"

"That is the next step in the same direction, naturally."

"And now your work is doubly hard, for you have not only that to solve, but you must find out who killed Guerdon."

"Why do you not go on to the next step?" Dick asked.

"What is that?"

"That maybe it was the wife who did the deed."

Murray gave a start.

"Oh, no, that cannot be," he declared.

"Why not?"

"You do not know the woman. She is an angel, if ever one came to live among us mortals."

"Your statement conflicts with the wording of this note, if we are to accept the idea you first advanced, that there was trouble between husband and wife."

Murray pulled at his goatee vigorously.

"I give it up," he finally declared. "I know less about it than when the discovery was first made."

"And I know considerably more," said Dick. "There is one thing further, Mr. Murray and you other gentlemen, before I go," and Dick addressed them all.

"What's that?" asked the sheriff.

"Will it not be just as well not to let my identity be known here for the present?"

"It will be better," said Murray. "If the murderer is still around the town the mention of your name will be sufficient to scare him off or make him lie so low that you will never find him."

"That is all, then, for the present; I will see you again later on, Mr. Murray."

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK LEARNS ONE THING.

When Dick left the bank he found that the crowd in front had increased.

It looked as if the whole population of the young city must be congregated there on the main street.

The crowd was eager and impatient to learn everything possible, and Dick had to stop and gratify their curiosity, to a degree, before he could proceed.

Finally, having made his way through the crowd, he inquired for the home of Cashier Guerdon, and the house was pointed out to him. It was a neat cottage a little distance up the gulch.

As Dick made his way in that direction, he turned the case over in mind.

It was in many respects peculiar.

He wondered if the news could not yet have reached Mrs. Guerdon.

It seemed to him that she would have hastened to the bank at once on hearing of the murder.

But, then, he recollected the fragment of letter in Guerdon's hand and addressed to her, and he believed that she had received the finished message.

Possibly, though, the shock of the news had prostrated her, and he would find her unable to receive him. However, no use of speculating; he would soon know.

Reaching the house, he touched the bell.

A woman opened the door to him, whom he rightly guessed to be a servant.

Her face looked distressed and her eyes were red with weeping. Dick knew at once that the news of the murder had reached there.

"I desire to see Mrs. Guerdon," he announced.

"She is not at home, sir," was the response. "I do not know where she can be."

"Not at home?"

"No, sir."

"You have heard what has happened at the bank?"

"Oh, yes, sir," bursting into tears and catching her apron up to her face. "It is terrible!"

"When did Mrs. Guerdon leave the house?"

"I do not know, sir."

"This morning?"

"I think it must have been last night, sir."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because her bed has not been slept in."

"Will you let me come in? I am trying to get at the truth of the murder of Mr. Guerdon. I am employed by Mr. Murray for that purpose."

"Come in if you want to, sir; but I have told you all I know. Oh! I am so wretched, to think that one is dead and the other gone, and they were both so good and kind."

This woman was about forty years of age, in Dick's judgment.

"Are you the only servant they had?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

He had now stepped into the hall and closed the door, and the woman opened the door of a sitting-room on the right.

Dick took a swift survey of that apartment as he entered it, and decided that the Guerdons had not lived high, if the appearance of that room was any criterion.

It was well but plainly furnished; then, too, the fact that they had kept but the one servant.

"When did you last see Mrs. Guerdon?" Dick asked.

"It was about nine o'clock last night."

"Where was she at that time?"

"In this room."

"What was she doing?"

"She was writing."

"Where was Mr. Guerdon?"

"He was out at the time, sir."

"Was he usually out in the evening?"

"Very seldom, sir. They were nearly always together."

"When did you see him last alive?"

"At supper, and a little later, when he took his hat and went out the door."

"The husband and wife did not have a quarrel, did they?"

"No, sir, but—"

"But what?"

"They were very silent at supper."

"Then they were not usually so?"

"No; but I had noticed the same thing all the previous day, and all that day. I believed they had met with some trouble; but, of course, I could not know what it was."

"Then you did not hear it spoken of?"

"No, sir."

"Did not Mrs. Guerdon mention it to you when you were alone with her?"

"No, sir, not a word of it. I found her crying several times, though, and I wondered what it could be."

"And you say she was writing when you saw her last?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what she was writing?"

"No, sir."

"Did it appear to be a letter?"

"Yes, sir; I think it was a letter."

"Do you know for whom it was intended?"

"N—no, sir."

"Do you think it was for Mr. Guerdon?"

"I—I could not say, sir."

"Have you found any such letter?"

"No, sir."

"And you say that was the last you saw of Mrs. Guerdon?"

"Yes, sir."

"You did not see her leave the house?"

"No, sir. You see, sir, I was going up to bed when I saw her in here writing."

"Did you speak to her?"

"I said good-night to her."

"And she responded?"

"Yes. She asked me if I had closed and locked up all the rear of the house, and when I told her I had she said she would wait up for Mr. Guerdon."

"And then this morning?"

"I called them at the usual hour—for I was always up first—but got no answer, and when I tried the doors and found them open, and that the beds had not been slept in, I did not know what to make of it."

"Did you tell any one?"

"No; I waited, thinking they would come any minute."

"And when did you hear about the murder?"

"I saw all the people running, and asked what was the matter, and so learned about it."

"I will not trouble you with many more questions, but—"

"Ask as many as you want to, sir. I will do all in my power to help find out who killed Mr. Guerdon."

"You do not believe that Mrs. Guerdon did it?"

The woman gave a scream.

"No, no," she cried. "That is not to be thought of. She loved him more than she loved her life."

"Well, after you went to bed, did you hear any one come to the door?" next inquired Dick.

"No, sir."

"Did any one bring a note for Mrs. Guerdon before you retired?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Then it is a mystery, sure enough. Have you made any search through the house to see if you could find anything to throw light upon it?"

"No, sir; I have been too upset to do anything."

"Then suppose we look now? You can lead the way, and perhaps we'll be able to find something."

The servant conducted him all through the house, but it was without avail. He found no scrap of writing that would throw any light upon the mystery.

The only thing he did learn was that Mrs. Guerdon had left the house armed. Her pistol was not in its accustomed place. But even that might not signify anything. Deadwood Dick was greatly mystified.

CHAPTER IX.

MURRAY URGES ACTION.

When Dick took leave, it was with the understanding that the servant was to communicate with him at once if anything developed.

He had spent more than an hour at the house, and when he reached the bank again he found that it was closed. A notice at one of the windows announced a temporary suspension.

The body of the cashier had been removed to the office of the coroner, who, by the way, carried on an undertaking business.

This was preparatory to taking it to his late residence.

Dick had been deputed to break the sad news to the widow, in case she had not already heard of it.

He now found Murray and his son, and several more of the prominent men of the town, standing on the walk in front of the bank discussing the sad occurrence.

Dick was introduced as Mr. Bristol, a gentleman who had come to Gold Ledge to see Mr. Guerdon, and who, shocked at finding him dead, was eager to lend a hand in solving the mystery.

The name by which he was so much better known was not mentioned.

"Had the widow heard about it?" Murray inquired.

"There is another mystery," said Dick, "and one that only serves to deepen this one."

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Guerdon is missing."

"Missing!"

"Yes."

Dick briefly stated the facts.

This, needless to say, created further sensation at once.

"When are we to reach the bottom of the matter. I wonder?" observed Mr. Murray.

"To my mind, it looks suspicious for Mrs. Guerdon," said his son, grimly. "A bad time for her to disappear, in the face of what has happened."

"You don't for a moment imagine that she killed her husband?" cried the father.

"I don't say so, no; but it looks suspicious."

"She never did it," declared Daniel, emphatically. "What do you say, Mr. Boise?"

"Hard to believe that she did, sir," was the response, "but as your son said, it was a bad time for her to disappear, as things have turned out."

"She had a pistol with her," said Dick.

"I don't care if she had twenty," cried Murray. "I say she is innocent of his blood."

"Then where can she be, father, and what would take her away so mysteriously?" asked James. "There is something wrong, that is sure."

"I don't pretend to know, of course," was the rejoinder, "but I will stake my last dollar that she did not kill him. Why, she was the most devoted wife I ever saw in my life."

"And yet there was something between them, as we now have reason to believe."

"Can't help it; you'll find her innocent."

"I hope so."

"When will the inquest be held?" inquired Dick.

"At one o'clock," said Mr. Murray. "It will be at the coroner's office."

"I must not fail to be on hand. I am in hopes that something will be brought out that will throw some light on the matter."

"So are we all," spoke up Mr. Boise.

"Will you come with us to the mine office, Mr. Bristol?" invited Mr. Murray. "We will talk the matter over more at length."

"Certainly, sir."

They took leave of the others and sauntered leisurely in that direction.

"Now, Bristol, what is your candid opinion?" asked Murray.

"I am all at sea," said Dick.

"You have no suspicion?"

"None with proof to support it. I want to know where Mrs. Guerdon is, and why she went away last night."

"And how do you hope to learn?"

"By search and inquiry, and by advertising, if need be."

"You think she will answer an advertisement?"

"If innocent, yes."

"Then you do not hold her to be innocent?"

"I have no proof of it. She must provide that, if she can. I do not accuse her, however."

"But, I insist that she is innocent, sir. If you were to know her you would say so, too. Then, you seem to have overlooked the main point in the matter."

"What do you call the main point?"

"The silver casket."

"I have no proof that the silver casket

is the keystone of the mystery, any more than I have that Mrs. Guerdon killed her husband."

"But, the evidence; is it not stronger?"

"In what particulars?"

"Why, the fact that the old man left the casket because he knew he was in danger; the fact of his murder; the fact that the casket is no longer in the safe in the bank."

"We have no proofs for anything."

"Then let us hold that woman innocent until we prove her guilty."

"Why, bless you, sir," said Dick, "that is what I always do. I must have proof before I can convict."

They now came to the mine office, and entered.

Three clerks were busy there, one of whom was the chief clerk and pay master of the mine.

He stepped up to James Murray, as they entered, and Dick heard him make inquiry about pay-day on the morrow.

"Oh! we are all right for that, I guess," said the superintendent, carelessly.

"I know, but the bank has been looted, and is now closed up. We'll pay in cash, then, I take it?"

"No, I'll make a deposit with the other bank, just temporary, and we can draw against that while our bank is closed."

"What's that you are saying?" demanded Murray, Sr.

James explained.

"Yes, that will do," he approved. "We'll attend to that right away, too."

"It is mighty lucky that we didn't make our deposit yesterday, eh, dad?" the son observed.

"Mighty lucky, you are right, Jim," was the response. "We would be in the lurch for pay-day, if we had, sure."

Mr. Murray worked the combination of a private safe, and opened it.

"What is the amount of the pay-roll?" he asked the clerk.

The sum was named.

The manager counted out a sum that would cover it, with some to spare, and locked the safe.

"Here," he said, "take this and deposit it in the Apache National, and get a supply of their check blanks. Tell them we'll draw on it to-morrow."

"Yes, sir."

The clerk took the money and wrapped it in a newspaper and set forth at once upon his errand.

"Mighty lucky indeed that we happened to have some on hand here," the manager observed again. "We usually deposit everything about the time pay-day comes around."

"And meant to do so to-day," said the son.

"But, let's sit down for a talk," said the father, motioning the others to chairs. "What are you going to do, Deadwood Dick?"

He spoke in low tone as he mentioned the name.

But he was not likely to be overheard, for they were in a private corner of the office, the clerks being at work on the other side of a partition.

"What I shall do will depend altogether upon circumstances," said Dick. "We must see what developments grow out of the matter, and set our sails according to the way the wind blows."

"Well, one thing bear in mind," said Murray, "we must have this mystery cleared up, no matter at what cost or sacrifice. If you were not here, you are the very man we would certainly send for, for your reputation is known where your face has never been seen."

CHAPTER X.

HORACE JEFFRIES FOUND.

Their conference was quite lengthy. Father and son were in earnest in their desire to have the mystery solved.

Daniel Murray wanted to offer a liberal reward, but Dick advised him to hold that back for a little time. He thought maybe a still hunt would accomplish more.

When Dick left the office he sought the hotel.

His mind was full of the case, or cases, that had been so suddenly thrust upon him.

He asked himself whether it was not in part, at least, something that Cashier Guerdon had prearranged for him, a surprise for him when he came.

This was the day fixed for his meeting with Guerdon; perhaps that gentleman intended to be found dead at this time, and leave it for Deadwood Dick to clear up the mystery.

There was one thing in the way of that, however.

To accept that theory, was to accept the theory of suicide, and no weapon had been found to support that.

And still Dick had some idea that it had been suicide nevertheless. The wording of the note the cashier had started to write to his wife, as discovered by the scrap in the basket.

Yet, if suicide, where was the weapon?

As said once before, a theory was framing in his mind, and gradually he was getting the support it needed.

Turning the different points over in mind, Dick headed for the leading hotel of the young city, feeling the need of fortifying the inner man, as it was high noon.

"Any chance to feed here?" he asked of the man at the desk.

"You will never get a better, if that is what you are after," was the cheery response.

"Well, that is just what I want," said Dick. "And while I am about it I will engage a room for a few days, too. Want my penuscript?"

"Yes, chalk down your cognomen, please."

He shoved out the register.

Dick dipped the pen, and poised it while he ran his eye over the list of recent arrivals.

The last name on the page caused him a start.

It was—Horace Jeffries, Helena, Mont.

"You know him?" asked the clerk.

"No," said Dick.

"I thought you did, the way you looked at the name."

"It is one that I have heard before. In fact, it is a man I have business with, though I don't know him."

"Serious business, may be."

"Oh, no, nothing of that kind; just business of the ordinary sort. How long has he been here?"

"Came this morning."

Dick was thoughtful.

"Any baggage?" he asked.

"Only a big handbag, that he seemed to take particular good care of."

Dick pulled at his mustache while he digested these remarks well. He felt that they might mean something, and were worthy of more than passing notice.

"What sort of chap is he?" he asked.

"Young, not over thirty; smooth face and ordinary clothes. No great shakes of a fellow."

"Say anything about his business?"

Dick jotted down his name while thus

talking, and shoved the register around to the clerk.

"Not a word," said the clerk.

"Well, will you point him out to me when chance offers?"

"Sure. I'll give you the wink when he comes in. But, you are sure to meet him at the table."

"Just describe him, then."

This was done in a moment.

"Thank you," said Dick, storing away the additional points mentioned. "I guess I will be able to pick out Mr. Jeffries all right."

"Now, I wonder what he is doing here?" he asked himself, as he turned away from the desk. "He is the chap the old man mentioned when he was dying. I wonder if he was the murderer?"

His thoughts reverted to that handbag. It was possible, and yet he would not admit it to himself, for good reasons.

In the first place, why would the man come there under his true name, if he had done a crime, or had come there with the intention of committing one?

And yet, the handbag—was it possible that it now contained the silver casket, to say nothing about the bank's funds? It was possible, but that it was probable Dick would not admit to himself.

Presently the gong sounded.

Dick was ready to respond, and was among the first to troop to the dining-room.

As he and those with whom he was in company entered by one door, two or three men entered by another, and one of these Dick recognized.

It was Horace Jeffries; he knew him by the description.

Without seeming effort Dick managed to get a seat alongside of him, and in due time opened up a conversation.

"You are a stranger here, like myself, I take it," he observed.

Jeffries gave him a searching look.

"Well, yes," he responded.

"I thought so, when I heard you inquiring for the post-office. You are the man registered from Montana?"

"That is where I am from, sir."

"Pardon me, if I annoy you, for I don't want to intrude if you don't want to talk; but I have a reason for making your acquaintance," the latter in lower tone.

The man started.

Dick noticed it, and that he gave him another searching survey, although Dick's eyes were apparently turned to his plate.

"A reason for scraping acquaintance with me?" the man repeated in substance.

"Yes; but don't let it out here."

"You do not know me, do you?"

"I know that your name is Horace Jeffries."

"And what do you know about Horace Jeffries, then?"

"This is hardly the place for a confidential chat," said Dick.

"Well, after dinner, then. It seems there has been a crime committed here recently."

The murder was the one subject among the others at the table.

Dick noticed, too, that eyes were turned frequently upon himself and his new acquaintance, and that the looks were at least inquiring.

"Yes, a dastardly crime," Dick responded. "It is one in which I am peculiarly interested, too. I came here to see the man who fell the victim to an assassin's bullet last night."

"And there is no suspicion who did it?"

"Not yet."

"I hear said that the motive was robbery."

"Well, a robbery was committed, but whether that was the real object, or only done to cover up the murder, I am not prepared to say."

"Then the cashier had foes?"

"I do not know that to be so, yet, but it is possible."

"Have you, then, a theory of your own? Did you know the man—but I suppose you did."

"No, I did not know him, but there was a strange piece of business transacted there at the bank yesterday that may have figured largely in the matter."

"What was that?"

"Why, an old man named Henry Wheaton—"

"Henry Wheaton!"

"You know him, then?"

"The very man I am in quest of, sir."

"Then I have a sad piece of news for you, my friend."

"You do not mean to say—"

"That Henry Wheaton is dead, yes. He was murdered last night—"

"Murdered!" dropping his knife and fork and starting up from the table. "Henry Wheaton murdered! My God, it cannot be true!"

CHAPTER XI.

HISTORY OF HENRY WHEATON.

All eyes were upon the young man.

He was greatly excited, almost overcome, it appeared.

Was he acting a part? That thought came into Deadwood Dick's mind as he watched him.

Dick had just let him know that he knew him, or rather, that he was a man he wanted to see. Was this for his benefit?

"Then he was a friend of yours?" Dick asked.

"He was my mother's uncle, sir. Where was he murdered? Have they got the murderer?"

"He was murdered between Hustleville and Grub Stake, two camps to the north of here, some time during the night. His body is now at Hustleville."

"Not now et ain't," spoke up a man at the table.

"No?"

"Ther sheriff has sent men over to fetch et in hyer, at the coroner's request."

"Ha! is that so? I wonder what was his object in that?"

"Well, he couldn't leave here himself, to-day, ye see, and then he wanted it identified positive."

"I see."

"But, the murderer?" questioned Jeffries.

"He has not been caught," said Dick. "There is another mystery."

The young man had resumed his seat, but not yet his knife and fork. He seemed quite overcome.

"Then he shall be hunted down, I swear it," he said in low, positive tone. "The wretch that murdered him shall be brought to justice, if I can find him on the face of the earth."

Deadwood Dick was impressed with his sincerity.

The young man hardly ate anything after that. He minced with his food until Dick was ready to rise from the table.

They left the room together.

"Will you come up to my room?" Jeffries asked.

"No, let us smoke a cigar on the piazza," said Dick. "The inquest is to be commenced at one."

"But, we must talk."

"We can do so there."

They passed out from the hall and took chairs near the end of the piazza, Dick putting his feet up on the railing and lighting a cigar.

Jeffries had declined one.

"Now, then, what did you want with me?" Jeffries asked.

"Your name was about the last word Henry Wheaton spoke before he died, and—"

"You said he was murdered?"

"I was the one to discover him, and he was not dead, though he died a very short time afterward."

"And what did he say about me?"

"Before I go into that, I must have proof that you are Horace Jeffries."

"Great Scott! Can't you take my word for it?"

"That is not the point; can you prove that you are he?"

"Of course I can prove it," with some indignation. "Maybe not right at once, but I can prove it."

"What was your business with Henry Wheaton?"

"What is that to you?"

"See here, it will not do for you and me to fall out and work at cross-purposes," said Dick.

"Why not?"

"Because I need your help, and you need mine. I believe you are just who and what you claim to be, even though I have no positive proof to that effect. I am ready to help you hunt down the murderer."

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"Then give me your hand."

The young man held out his own, and Dick gave his.

"What is your name?" Jeffries asked, while their hands met and clasped firmly.

"I am known as Deadwood Dick, Jr."

The face of the young man instantly blanched, and his grip relaxed involuntarily.

Deadwood Dick's keen, magnetic eyes were upon him, as if reading him through and through, and he seemed to quail under their gaze.

"Then you have heard of me before?" said Dick.

"Who has not heard, or read, of the far-famed Deadwood Dick?" was the rejoinder.

"And perhaps not much good of me," said Dick.

He was glad to feel the clasp tighten upon his hand again before their hands parted.

"But much of the good you have done for others, sometimes not only without reward, but with actual loss to yourself. Do you mean that you will aid me in what I am about to undertake?"

"Hunting down the slayer of Henry Wheaton?"

"Yes."

"Of course I meant it. But it will be you helping me, for I have already taken upon myself the task."

"Then if there is anything I can do to help, you have only to command me. Under such a leader, I am perfectly willing to take the second place. What is to be done?"

"I must know everything you can tell me of Henry Wheaton."

"You shall."

"And of his enemies, for I take for granted that enemies he had. In fact, he said so himself."

"As to that, I cannot say, but his story is simple and soon told, although it has something of unusual interest in it."

"You may have time before the inquest begins."

"It is short."

"Henry Wheaton, while not a crazy man, as many of his business transactions amply prove, was eccentric. He was a millionaire at one time, but whether worth anything to-day—or at his death—is hard to say."

"Those who profess to know say that he has been gradually letting go his possessions, and when last seen by my mother he was little better than a tramp. What he was doing with his wealth no one knew. There were some who tried to make it their business to find out, however."

"Of those, I was one when I came here, for my mother has an interest there, as well as some others I can name. She sent me, not alone with a selfish motive, but she has recently come into another estate, and intended giving the old man a home. Others would look askance at this statement, of course, but I know my mother, and know that her heart was in it."

"A question," Dick interrupted. "How did you know that Henry Wheaton was at this place at this time?"

"I did not know it. We heard from him last in this Territory, and I have been going from place to place in quest of him."

"Proceed."

"Years ago Henry Wheaton met a great loss in the death of his wife, who was murdered. My mother recently told me about this. For a time it was feared that his reason would give way, and, in fact, he was never like his former self again. Who the murderer was, was never ascertained, but it was believed to have been a young man named Northton, who was at the time in his employ, and who was never seen again. Northton's people scouted the idea, however, and held to the assertion that he, too, had met with foul play on the same occasion, and his body made away with."

"The motive for that crime was robbery, as was shown by the open private safe, the absence of a large sum of money it had contained, and a quaint old silver box, for some reason very highly prized, was tightly clasped in the arms of the murdered woman, as if she had snatched it out of the hands of her slayer the moment before his knife did its fatal work. That box had been with the money in the safe—in fact, in an inner part of the safe where a burglar would not have been likely to see it, and that fact made it seem all the plainer that the deed had been done by one familiar with the safe and its contents. Indeed, the old man held that it had been solely to get possession of the silver box that the burglary had been attempted, and that the murder was only incidental."

"As I have said, he was never quite himself again. He had no family, and he soon sold his home and wandered away. He was here, there, and all over, and it was understood that his fixed purpose in life was to hunt down the slayer of his wife."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK EXPRESSES HIS THEORY.

About the time Jeffries reached that point in his narrative, Daniel Murray and his son came along.

Deadwood Dick had just time to say to Jeffries that he should keep to himself what had passed between them, when Murray stopped and spoke.

"Come, you are going to the inquest, of course," he said.

"Is it time?" asked Dick, consulting his watch.

"High time, if Hammond begins promptly."

"Then we'll walk along with you. Mr. Murray, this is Mr. Horace Jeffries."

Murray gave the young man a searching look as he responded, and while he was being introduced to the son as well, which Dick noticed.

They walked away in company in the direction of the coroner's office, where they found a crowd gathered.

The room was seemingly filled to its full capacity.

Way was made for them somehow, nevertheless, and they were given chairs well up in front.

Murray and his son sat facing Dick and his new acquaintance, with the coffin of the murdered cashier between them.

The body had been prepared and put in its coffin, but in the absence of Mrs. Guerdon it had been retained at the undertaker's shop.

Its presence there served to add to the solemnity of the occasion, and there was something of an awed hush over the assembly. It was almost a new experience for Gold Ledge.

Mr. Hammond was a man of some education and considerable experience, and he went about the matter in a business-like way.

It took him but a little while to get a jury.

The first witness, then, was the Guerdons' servant, who answered to the name of Jane Wagner.

Her testimony was about in line with the statements she had already made to Deadwood Dick, so it is needless to repeat it here. She was pained, sorrowful, mystified.

The next, who should, perhaps, have been the first—was George Coleman, the discoverer of the crime. His testimony, too, we have seen. He was closely questioned, but did not vary in any of his statements, though some were elaborated more in particular.

Then Daniel Murray took the stand.

"Have you any theory as to this crime?" the coroner inquired.

"Yes, I have, but whether it is right or not is a question, sir," he answered.

"What is that theory?"

"A man named Henry Wheaton called at the bank yesterday and wanted to leave a silver casket there for safe keeping. He said he was afraid to carry it further, for he was watched and knew that it would be taken from him. He has since been found murdered, and now that the casket is missing from the bank I am inclined to the belief that the enemies of that old man took it."

Horace Jeffries had given a start, at mention of the silver casket, and was somewhat pale.

"How could they know where the casket of silver—or the silver casket—was?" inquired the coroner.

"Why, a paper written by the depositor was in his possession, or the one-half of it, to be exact, and that would give some idea as to what had been done with the box. The rest of it must have been forced from the old man's unwilling lips; if more was needed."

"Then you are inclined to the belief—"

"As I said, that these enemies who were following the old man, and who eventually killed him, came here later and robbed the safe."

"But, sir, they robbed the bank as well—"

"Fools if they would not, being thieves anyhow and having the safes open be—"

fore them. But that was only incidental; their object was to get possession of the silver box."

"Then how came the cashier there at that time?"

"You now ask me more than I can answer. He was not at home; he might have been discovered in the bank. They may have found him elsewhere and forced him to open the bank to them. These are questions that no one can answer at this time, save the rascals themselves."

"Do you know what the bank's loss is?"

"No, sir, but of course the books will show that."

"A step further, Mr. Murray; have you any idea what has become of Mrs. Guerdon?"

"Not the slightest, sir."

"You do not believe that she shot her husband?"

"Decidedly not, sir."

That phase of the matter was gone into at length, but nothing was brought out that is not already known to the reader.

Deadwood Dick was then called by his proper name.

Some preliminary questions asked and answered, inquiry was made as to the business that had brought him to Gold Ledge City.

"You say you had an appointment with Cashier Guerdon," said the coroner. "Will you please tell us what the nature of that appointment was—that is, the business it concerned?"

"I do not know," said Dick.

"You do not know?"

"No, sir."

"That is rather strange, keeping an appointment without knowing what for."

"At that meeting, sir, he was to have told me the business he desired me to transact for him. The immediate object of the meeting was that, sir."

"Then you are a professional man?"

"Yes, sir."

"What profession?"

"Must I answer that in public?"

Dick was a little surprised at the change of programme, for it had been understood that his identity was to be kept secret for a time.

He looked at Mr. Murray, to find that gentleman tugging at his goatee and looking steadfastly at the floor. He seemed annoyed by the course the coroner's questions were taking.

"Of course you must answer," said the coroner. "We desire the fullest possible light upon this case."

"Well, I am a detective," said Dick.

There was a stir immediately. Something about that word has a charm for a crowd of average Americans.

"And you have no idea what was wanted of you?"

"Not the slightest."

"Is not that strange?"

"I do not think so; I expected to be informed when I met Mr. Guerdon. Not likely that he would put it on paper, if it was of great importance."

"Well, we have to take your view of that, Mr. Bristol. Now, what is your theory of this matter? Being a detective, as you claim to be, you must have formed some theory respecting it."

Dick did not like the man's manner at all.

He looked again toward Mr. Murray, to find him still looking hard at the floor.

"My theory," he answered, "is assuming the shape that leads me to believe that Mr. Guerdon committed suicide, in spite of the fact that there was no weapon found."

Mr. Murray looked up quickly.

"How do you make—"

He was about to put a question, but checked himself, recollecting that he had no right to do so there.

"What were you going to ask?" inquired the coroner.

"I forgot myself for the moment," said the president, "but I was going to inquire why Mr. Guerdon would make an appointment with a man and then take his own life before the appointment was kept? That was not Guerdon's way."

"I think I can answer the question to your satisfaction, sir," said Dick. "My belief is that he discovered for himself something that he wanted me to undertake to discover for him, and, as it was something that concerned his happiness closely, he took his life."

"Mr. Hammond, kin I put in a word right hyer?" inquired a voice in the crowd, as a man pushed his way to the front.

"Yes, if it is calculated to throw any light upon this matter," permission was granted.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVENTS TAKE AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

All eyes were turned in that direction. Deadwood Dick noted that it was one of the men who had been eyeing him closely while he was at the table.

Dick felt that mischief was brewing, but he could not yet scent what it was. He felt a change in the air, as it were, that had commenced to be manifest the moment he took the stand.

"Et is only my idee," said the man, when he reached the small open space, "but it may be worth somethin' all the same."

Jury and audience hung upon his words.

"Speak out, Jacob Bliss," said the coroner. "And if there is any one else present who knows anything about the affair, or has anything to offer that may give us light, let him come forward."

"Et ain't nothin' I know," said the fellow, shifting his weight uneasily, "but mebby it will be worth mentionin'. I remember a case that happened in Californy a good many years ago, where a chap was murdered and his murderer was the one to hold the inquest—"

Mr. Hammond gave a violent start, and the murmur in the crowd caused the speaker to stop short.

"Not that I am goin' to say the same thing is the case hyer, Mr. Hammond," he hastened to assure, "but I am not so sure that et ain't some of these hyer strangers what have dropped in jist at this time."

He waved his hand in the direction of Dick and Jeffries, but did not look at them.

Dick had his keen eyes upon the fellow, and began to see the drift of matters.

Jeffries gave a start and paled.

All eyes were turned upon them, now, and the Murrys sat bolt upright and stared at them.

"You do not mean these two gentlemen, do you?" asked the coroner.

"Wull, to be blunt about et," said the man, doggedly, "them's jist who I do mean, nobody else."

Deadwood Dick smiled grimly.

"This is a serious charge to make, Mr. Bliss," said the coroner. "I suppose that you have something with which to back up your statement?"

"Wull, I ain't got no proofs, ef you mean that, but when ye add two and two together and git four, ye gen'ly kalky-

late that the sum is right, don't ye? That is what I have done."

"You are rather an interesting witness, my man," said Deadwood Dick, speaking up. "Suppose you show your hand, now, and let us see just what you hold."

"Et ain't because I have got anything in ther world ag'in ye," said the fellow, "fer I ain't; but when I see a thing the same as I see this hyer I am bound to speak out."

"That is right."

"If you aire innercent, et won't do ye no harm, and you will pardon me fer a mistake when my meanin' was all right. Ef ye aire guilty— Wull, William Guerdon was a friend of mine, that's all."

"Your intention seems to be fair," said Dick. "Now, let us hear upon what grounds you make this foolish charge."

Still the man did not meet his eyes.

"Wull, you see, coroner," he said, "I was at dinner with 'em, and I noticed that they done a good deal of whisperin' together, and fer strangers, which they 'peared to be when they spoke right out, they had a mighty good understandin' between 'em."

There was no doubt of the impression this made on the crowd.

There was a good deal of nodding and nudging among them, and all eyes were centred upon the two accused men.

Jeffries looked alarmed, and sat speechless, looking helplessly to Deadwood Dick for his defense. Dick met the gaze of all in his grim manner.

Daniel Murray had a look of surprise, and he and his son exchanged glances. The father had his hands on the arms of the chair in which he sat, as if ready to rise up to say something.

"We were strangers, nevertheless," said Dick. "Is that all, my good man?"

"No, that ain't quite all. Mind, I don't 'cuse ye; that ain't in my line; but I think we'd orter know more about ye 'n what we do at present."

"Perhaps you will, later," said Dick, sotto voice.

"Go on with what you would say," said the coroner.

"Wull, add to them facts that they aire both interested in this case, and that both kem hyer to-day, and see what ther sum is. Ain't et jist and right that we should know all about 'em?"

Mr. Murray here rose up.

"I don't see anything wrong in what Bliss has proposed," he said, "but I want to assure him that he has made a mistake. It was not our intention to let it out right away, but this gentleman, men of Gold Ledge City, is no other than the renowned Deadwood Dick."

There was a sensation then, sure enough.

"Is thar anybody hyer that knows him?" the man demanded.

As it happened, this town was one rather out of Dick's regular beat, so to say, and he had never been there before.

No one responded.

"Do you know he is Deadwood Dick, Mr. Murray?"

"Not that I could prove it," said the mine manager, "but he says he is, and I see no reason—"

"His say-so hadn't orter go hyer at this time," interrupted the man. "What we want is the genuine proof. Ef he can't show up that, to the jug with him, is what I say!"

There was a faint cheer.

"I am not always prepared to prove up on short notice," said Dick, "but I can bring you all the proof you can ask for if you can give me a few days to do it

in. It is the same with this gentleman; I asked him to prove that he was Horace Jeffries, and he asked for time."

"What did I tell ye?" cried the accuser, growing bolder. "Do ye see how he tries to worm out of et? Do ye see what a nice game they are tryin' to work hyer together? D'ye see how quick one is to speak up for t'other? Does et stand to reason that they have jist met fur the first time to-day? Not sayin' they lie, but I do say let 'em prove up, by mighty!"

Voices in the crowd supported the suggestion.

The Murrays looked from one to the other, as if they hardly knew what action to take.

"I can't take any stock in such an idea," spoke up the superintendent. "This man came here as Deadwood Dick, and we must treat him as such until we learn to the contrary; don't you say so, father?"

"I certainly do," agreed Daniel.

"Et ain't nothin' to me—or it wouldn't be, ef William Guerdon hadn't been a good friend of mine," urged the accuser, "but as he was that I mean to urge that these hyer two strangers show up proofs before we let em go."

The crowd supported it more strongly than ever.

"If they aire innocent, no harm done, and ef they don't happen to be jist what they claim, thar we have got 'em."

"That's so! That's so!"

"Then you would propose our arrest?" demanded Dick.

"No, not jist that, but I would p'pose havin' ye searched and made to show up fer all ye are worth."

Dick's eyes began to gleam with a dangerous light, but for the time being he managed to hold back his rising indignation. He saw, as it were, the fine Italian hand of a master behind this rough fellow.

"Well, I am ready to submit to that," said Dick, "and I suppose this gentleman will have no objections."

"None whatever, so long as they give back what belongs to me," said Jeffries.

"Proof that ef I am right they have taken good care not to have anything about 'em that would tell against 'em, coroner," said the fellow Bliss. "But, let 'em show, all the same, and if I am wrong they may be able to prove that. Et is as fair fur them as it is fur us, anyhow."

"See here, my fine chap, who put you up to this, anyhow?" demanded Dick, indignantly.

"Who put me up to et?"

"Yes."

"Do you hear that, coroner? I leave et to you ef it sounds much as if I had hit the wrong mark with my shot? Does that sound like what ye might expect from Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

CHAPTER XIV.

HELD BY THE JURY.

The inquest had taken an unexpected turn.

The crowd was beginning to grow excited, and Dick saw trouble ahead.

Events had been turned in such a way that he and his companion were suddenly seen in a false light.

He recognized that a genius of no mean caliber was behind the scenes, for he knew well enough that this man Bliss was not acting on his own responsibility solely.

The coroner looked serious.

"This thing has assumed such shape," he said, "that I am bound to take notice of the half-way charge that has been

made, even though I do not believe in it myself. Gentleman, it is my unpleasant duty to ask you to submit to being searched for evidence."

"It is preposterous!" cried Jeffries.

"It is our misfortune," said Dick, quietly. "Let them proceed with their show."

"You are unfortunate in that you are strangers, merely," said the coroner. "This can do you no harm, and will satisfy your accuser."

"Well, go ahead," Dick invited. "It will be my turn later on, when I will make somebody dance to my tune, or I am a cow, that's all! Come on and do your searching, Mr. Bliss."

"Et ain't fer me to do that," muttered the fellow.

"I will call upon Sheriff Crossen and Deputy Hurley," said the coroner. "Believing that you are innocent, I hope you will pardon the inconvenience we are putting you to, gentlemen."

"Go ahead with the farce," said Dick.

"It is no farce, sir, so far as I am concerned, please understand," said the coroner.

"I am willing to believe that," said Dick, in response. "I hope to live long enough to show you something that has been, though."

The sheriff and his man came forward, and Dick and his companion held up their hands.

It looked like the old stage coach days.

As it happened, Dick had absolutely nothing with which to prove who he was, and it was almost the same with Jeffries.

They had weapons, both of them—Dick's fine brace of guns, but he happened to be without handcuffs, having left his last pair on the wrists of a desperado he had taken only a short time before.

"That is about all, I guess," said the sheriff, at last. "No, here is another pocket—nothing but a bit of paper, though."

"A bit of paper is a good deal, sometimes," said Hurley.

"Let's see et?" called out Bliss.

It was handed over to the coroner, who looked at it, and as he did so his brows seemed to knit with interest.

"This begins to assume a serious aspect," he said, "after what you testified to respecting the box Henry Wheaton left at the bank, Mr. Murray," and he handed the bit of paper to him.

Murray glanced at it and leaped to his feet.

"The mischief!" he cried. "It is the paper that Henry Wheaton wrote at the bank, half of which he left with Guerdon!"

A loud murmur in the crowd.

"I have every reason to believe that you are right; in fact, I know you are right, sir," said Dick, calmly. "Henry Wheaton gave me that bit of paper just before he died."

"Kin ye prove that?" demanded Jake Bliss.

"You have my word for it," said Dick. "There was no witness present; I was alone with him."

"The same as we have yer word fur et that you are Deadwood Dick, which I more and more begin to doubt. Besides, what a dead man said don't go in law, mebbly you know."

"Are you a lawyer?"

"Wull, I have got a smattering of et."

"And a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," said Dick.

"You say the man gave you this piece of paper?" asked the coroner, impressively.

"Yes, sir."

"You said nothing about it before."

"Because it was not necessary. I had no right to claim the box it calls for, and I was not sure yet that I had found the man who had the right. And, in face of the fact that the box is gone, it was of no use anyhow."

"You are Deadwood Dick, then, as you claimed."

"Certainly."

"Fer which we must have the proof, now," cried Bliss. "Guerdon was my friend, as I have said, and I ain't goin' to accept nothin' on say-so. Gentlemen of the jury, I charge these hyer two with the killin' of William Guerdon. That will hold 'em till they kin prove up, I opine. Not that I have got the least bit of grudge, but I don't want to take no chances on their gettin' away if they ain't what they claim."

"That is fair spoken enough," cried a voice in the crowd.

"How will it do to allow the coroner to run this business," suggested Dick, at that juncture. "It seems to me that you are taking the case out of his hands, if not, indeed, out of the hands of the jury."

Thus reminded, the coroner flushed.

"A good deal of this is out of order," he declared, tapping the table near at hand for silence in the room. "I will now pass the case over to the jury for their decision."

The sheriff had given Dick's weapons and other effects back into his keeping, the deputy the same with respect to Jeffries', and they stepped back to their places, while the coroner proceeded with his charge.

The charge as at length.

It was a fair one, dealing with nothing but facts as they had been brought out.

At length it was over, and the jury retired to deliberate; and barely had they gone from the room when there was a commotion at the door.

Way was made, and a body was borne into the room.

It was that of Henry Wheaton.

The men who had gone over to Hustleville for it had performed their errand quickly.

It was laid out upon the table, just behind the coffin in which the body of the dead cashier reposed, and thus the two men who had met the day before in life were brought together again in death.

The crowd appeared to feel the solemnity of it.

"If these hyer two could only speak," said Jake Bliss to those near him, loudly enough for all to hear, "they would tell the story so that nobody could doubt et."

"And since they can't speak, it will be my duty to bring the truth to light in their behalf," said Deadwood Dick.

"I only hope you are what ye claim, and kin do et," was the rejoinder.

Dick and Jeffries talked together, while the jury were out, and they were not unmindful of the fact that they were frequently the focus of many eyes.

Daniel Murray and his son, too, talked together, and presently they joined Dick.

"We have been talking about your case, Bristol," said Murray the father, "and we want to help you if we can."

"In what way do you mean?"

"You see, we know people here and you do not, and knowing the men on that jury, we are of the mind that they may make trouble for you. In case they do, how is the quickest way for us to prove up for you?"

"Then you don't doubt me?"

"Not a bit. All you have got to do is tell us how to prove that you are Deadwood Dick."

"That will be easy enough, if you want to take the trouble. I will give you a list of ten—twenty—fifty names if you say so, and you can bring any of the men here to identify me."

"Very well; and you, young man?"

"I am a good way from home," said Jeffries.

"Never mind about him," said Dick. "I will answer for him, once my identity is proved to the satisfaction of all concerned."

Just then the jury returned, and the foreman being called on for the verdict, he rendered the report that in the opinion of the jury the deceased had come to his death at the hands of some person to the jury unknown; but they recommended the holding of two men on suspicion, namely, the two charged by Jacob Bliss as the possible assassins.

CHAPTER XV.

DICK AND PARD IN LIMBO.

Deadwood Dick was about to spring to his feet.

He had something to say, and wanted to seize the opportunity for saying it.

Greatly to his surprise, however, hands seized him from behind and forced him down again to his chair, and he saw that Jeffries was receiving the same usage.

"Pretty well cut and dried, gentlemen," he grated, speaking with all the calmness he could force.

"We don't mean to allow you the chance to use a gun," was the reply.

"Do you think I would be fool enough to shoot anybody?"

"Nobody but yourself, maybe."

Dick smiled.

Jeffries was red in the face, and had struggled some at the first contact, but found it was useless.

"Sheriff, you have heard the verdict," said the coroner. "You will hold these men prisoners until they have a chance to prove who they are to the satisfaction of all concerned."

"May I be permitted to say something?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"Yes, you may speak."

"I started to do so a moment ago, but found that I was counting without my host. I want to say that this is not only a mistake, but an outrage. I am able to see about as far through a plank as the next one, and I am beginning to get my eyes open here. It is a deeper case than I had any idea of in the beginning. I expect to be on hand when the final call is made, I want to tell you, and I think you will have reason then to open your eyes."

"You talk in riddles," said Mr. Murray.

"Everything is a riddle, just now, sir," said Dick. "There is, however, an answer to every riddle, and I mean to find the answer to this one. I will solve this enigma, or go out of business."

"I hate to have to do this," said the sheriff, "but you know what my duty is. Hurley, look after the other one."

He stepped before Dick with a leveled gun.

"It is all right," said Dick. "I am not going to offer any resistance, so you will have no trouble. Disarm me, and I will go with you. There is no use kicking when you are down."

"All right, let me have your guns, then, and I'll escort you to the lock-up."

They were disarmed and taken to the jail.

The crowd followed them, the whole population of the young city, it seemed, but it was not demonstrative.

Murray entered with them—he stuck to them to the last, and as the door was

closed upon them he took paper and pencil from his pocket, saying:

"Now, those names, Deadwood Dick, and I'll have friends here for you just as speedily as wire or messengers can bring them. This is an outrage, but it is one that cannot be helped."

"I have changed my mind, Mr. Murray," said Dick.

"Changed your mind?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I am used to fighting out alone, when I get into a difficulty, and I am not going to squeal this time."

"But, confound it, it is not squealing to call on a friend or two to come and identify you, is it? Don't be foolish, now, but give me the names and let me get them."

"I don't want to trouble my friends," said Dick. "You believe that I am just what I claim to be?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then you can help me more than all my friends, and at the same time put me in the way of solving these mysteries and clearing up the whole matter."

"How is it to be done?"

"Give me the means of escaping to-night, and leave the rest to me."

"It would never do," said Murray, firmly. "I happen to be mayor of the town, and if it were found out—No, no, it can't be done."

"Then it is plain that you have not the confidence in me that you profess."

"It is true that I have nothing but your word."

"Then we may as well call a halt, and let events take their own course, mayor."

"No, I want to be of service to you. I want to see you out of here, and I want to be the means of getting you out, in the right kind of way. Don't be stubborn, now."

"No stubbornness about it, sir; I have simply made up my mind to see it through."

"Well, I'll have to do the best I can to get hold of some of your friends without your help, then. Make yourself as comfortable here as you can. I'll see that you don't want for anything."

So the mayor left them.

"What do you think?" asked Dick of his companion.

"I think we are in a deuce of a fix, for one thing," said Jeffries.

"We'll get out of it all right. I want to let them go their length. I see daylight ahead."

"You do not suspect who killed Henry Wheaton, do you?"

"Not yet, but I suspect who knows a good deal about it all."

"The man who got us into this fix?"

"Yes; and not meaning the same man you mean, either."

"Who?"

"Murray, he is the man."

"What! You do not mean it. I thought perhaps—"

"You thought I meant Bliss, the man who worked it against us, but he was only a tool."

"But, what proof have you?"

"Not a scrap, but that finer sixth sense that usually tells me when I am on the right track. He is the man, and I am willing to bet ducats on it. You will see."

"But you said you believed that Guerdon committed suicide."

"I said I would believe that, had the weapon been found there. One reason, the shot was fired at such short range!"

"And you believe that I am just what I claim to be?"

"You have proven that to my satisfaction, now."

"How?"

"By the story you told."

They entered into a long conversation, and by the time it was ended they were both of one mind.

Meantime, the inquest over the body of Henry Wheaton had been held, and at its close Mayor Murray came again to the jail, accompanying the man who took the prisoners' suppers.

"Here is the best supper for you that the town can get up," he said, as the man put it on the table for them.

"Glad to get it," said Dick.

"If there is anything else you want, you have only to ask for it."

"Only a hog would ask for more," said Dick, with a laugh. "What has been done about the other inquest?"

"That is partly what I came to tell you about. You see they had another jury entirely, this time, but the mischief that fellow Bliss started has been spreading—"

"And we are held on the charge, eh? I am not surprised."

"Well, that is it, in few words."

"There is one consolation, they will find it difficult to prove it, and by the time my case comes to trial I guess I will have something to say."

"And I will have something to say before that," said the mayor. "I am going to communicate with the governor, who I know must know you, and he will send somebody to convince the people here who you are."

"I had rather you would not trouble him," said Dick.

"You have nothing to say, this hand, my good fellow."

So he left them.

"I can't believe that your suspicion is correct," said Jeffries, when he had gone.

"And I am more convinced of it than ever," said Dick. "He has no intention of sending for the governor, but there is a deeper game afoot that we must look out for."

Deadwood Dick was not mistaken. There was something deeper, but there was also a wheel within the wheel.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

The lock-up was a strong affair.

It had been built to hold all it received, in the way of tough customers.

In the rear wall were two windows, long and narrow—too narrow to admit of a man's crawling through, even were there no bars, as there were.

The windows were too high up for the prisoners to see out without getting up on the table to do so, and even then they faced the bare mountain on the south of the gulch, and little was to be seen.

The jail was on the outskirts of the town, as if, an unclean thing, it had been set apart.

Night came on and settled down.

The prisoners had a light, however, and a bottle of wine and plenty of cigars.

True to his word, Murray had seen to it that they wanted for nothing the town could supply, and they were as comfortable as they could be made.

They spent the evening talking, trying to plan some means of getting out.

While they were thus engaged, there came a tapping at the bars of one of the narrow windows, and they listened.

There was no mistaking it, and Dick got up on the table, and shading his eyes with his hat from the light of the lamp, tried to peer out.

He could see nothing, however; the darkness was too great, and his eyes were blinded by the glare of the lamp before which he had been sitting so long.

While he looked, however, the tapping came again, and he saw that it was done by means of a stick that was being trailed lightly along across the bars by some person on the ground beneath the window. Who could it be?

"Who is there?" Dick called, just loud enough to be heard.

"A friend," was the answer, in a woman's voice. "Do you know your lives are in danger?"

"Well, I am not surprised any to hear it," said Dick.

"It is so. You are to be lynched at midnight, or later, unless I can get you out of there."

"Then it is to be hoped that you can get us out."

"I intend to try. I thought I would come first and warn you, and so put you on your guard. You must not go to sleep, but wait and watch for my return."

"Who are you?" inquired Dick.

"No matter now," the response. "You will learn later."

"All right. But what is your plan for getting us out? We can be preparing for it."

"I think I can get a key that will unlock the door. If I can do that, all will be well. If not, I must help you some other way. I will bring two axes, if I can do no better."

"All right, but the key if you can. And, say, bring us weapons, if possible."

"I will."

With that, Dick heard her scurry away in the darkness.

About an hour later the tapping was heard again, and again Dick got upon the table.

"What luck?" he asked.

"The best," was the answer. "I will unlock the door and hurry away, and you come out in a minute or two and lock the door after you and take away the key."

"All right. And what then?"

"Go around and come to the back door of the Guerdon cottage, and I will let you in."

That was all, and it was enough. Dick knew he had heard the voice before, and now he knew where. It was the Guerdons' servant, the woman he had interviewed that morning.

They next heard the lock turned, and waiting then a few moments they tried the door.

It was unlocked.

Hurrying out, they stumbled upon some weapons that lay on the sill, and which they quickly gathered up.

They had before this put out their light, in order that they might not be seen, and that the woman might not be detected in her second visit, and now they quickly locked the door and made off.

"If the woman was right," said Dick, "there will be a surprise party by and by."

"I wouldn't wonder," said his comrade.

They lost no time, but reached the Guerdon cottage as soon as possible, and the door opened at their coming.

"Hurry in," said the woman. "Do not be seen. I suppose I have run a great risk in what I have done, but I knew they meant to hang you, and that you were innocent."

"You have done us a great service, and I hope to repay it sometime."

"Do not mention that."

"How did you learn that we were to be lynched?"

"That is something I prefer not to tell, but it came so straight that I could not doubt it."

"Very well, we will not press you. We ought to be well satisfied to be out of their reach. By the way, do you think they can suspect where we are?"

"Only one man knows, and I know I can trust him."

"Who is he?"

"He made me swear that I would not tell, before he would give up the key—"

She stopped short, but it was too late to save what she evidently now wished she had not let out. She had given Dick the clew he desired.

"Never mind," said Dick, quietly. "I understand, but you need have no fear that I will let it out. Now, the real work on the case will begin, and there is going to be music by and by."

"I think I did wrong in keeping something from you this morning," the woman observed.

"Then you held something back?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I told you I knew nothing about the letter Mrs. Guerdon wrote before she went away."

"And all the time you did, eh?"

"I had it in my pocket."

"Well, I am not a whole lot surprised."

"You see, she stopped me as I was going up to bed, and, finishing the letter, sealed it, and addressed it to Mr. Guerdon and handed it to me. She told me to hand it to Mr. Guerdon and no one else, the first thing in the morning. Then she bade me good-night."

"And you went on up to bed?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you think?"

"That she was going to leave him; but what could I do? I could do nothing."

"Then you had reason to suspect that she loved another man—"

"No, no, I do not believe anything of that kind, sir; she loved Mr. Guerdon with all her heart, but she had a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes; and some one knew it, and—"

"I begin to get hold of the whole unfortunate business, now," said Dick. "Mr. Guerdon found it out and killed himself, and—"

But he paused without finishing.

The woman had conducted them into the dining-room, where the shutters were closed and the shades drawn down, so that no one without could discover any light.

"Do you think it would be right for me to deliver her letter to you?" she asked.

"I do not think you can do any better," said Dick. "You certainly cannot deliver it to Mr. Guerdon, and as I am here to solve the mystery and bring the truth to light, I ought to have it."

"Well, here it is. Take it, and give me the key of the jail, which I will return where I got it while you read it."

It was an exchange Dick was glad to make, for he believed the letter was a key that would the better answer his purpose. And he was not mistaken. It opened the way for the clearing up of the whole business.

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER MURDER MYSTERY.

An hour after midnight, a score of silent men approached the jail.

Not a word was spoken among them, and they moved like veritable shadows of the night, all of them in disguise.

There was a peculiarity about their disguise, in that every man appeared exactly like all the rest. Long black gowns covered them from their heads to their feet.

If known to one another, they certainly could not have been known to others, even if discovered.

At the jail all was darkness.

Silently they approached, and one of the foremost applied a key to the lock and silently opened the door.

No sound came from within, though they paused and listened, and the one who had unlocked the door stepped within, the others close after him, and the light of a bull's eye was flashed around.

"Gone!"

That one word escaped the leader.

They simply stood and stared, and for some moments could do nothing more.

Some of them had their guns in hand, others held stout cords with which to have bound the prisoners, and another carried a coil of rope, none of which things were needed.

If ever there were a surprised lot of men, they were they.

"Gone!"

The leader could only utter the exclamation again, and the others could only echo it.

Dealing with mysteries for the past twenty-four hours, they were here confronted with one that beat them all, for of the others they had more or less knowledge.

"Where are they? How did they get out?"

"Useless to ask; they are gone. Well, the party is over, boys; get out of here and hunt your holes."

So said the leader, in rough, gruff voice, evidently an attempt at disguising it, having made doubly sure the men were not there; and they all withdrew and the door was locked as before.

There they parted, and the night swallowed them all.

"Escape! Impossible!"

So exclaimed Mayor Murray the next morning, when Sheriff Crossen apprised him of the fact.

"Yes, clean gone," said the sheriff.

"Somebody let them out in the night, for the door was found locked as it was left, and no damage done."

"What do you think about it? Who can it have been?"

"Why, I think there is no doubt that it was Deadwood Dick, and that some aide of his picked the lock and let him escape. There is no other explanation to offer."

"You must be right. And if that is the case—"

"We may expect to hear from him again."

"Not a doubt of it. Well, we are in a cloud of mystery, and the sooner he brings his search light to bear upon it, the better."

But the days passed, and nothing more was heard of Deadwood Dick, and the affair was beginning to lose its keen edge.

Strangers came and went, true, but they were closely watched by certain individuals, on the quiet.

One afternoon the stage from the nearest railroad point—for Gold Ledge City was in a place inaccessible to railroads—brought a veiled woman into the town, who had with her a boy perhaps fourteen years of age.

She registered and engaged two rooms, one for herself and the other for the boy, and ordered her meals brought to her room, where they remained all the rest of the day, seeing no one. On the following morning they took the stage, and left as mysteriously as they had come.

But something had been left behind.

The servant who looked after the rooms presently came running down to

the hotel office, pale to the lips, and with her eyes widely distended.

"Murder!" she gasped. "There is a dead man up in room 24. Come up and see." And a good deal more in her nervousness, startling all who heard her and moving them to action.

Those who followed her up found that she had spoken the truth. A man was lying on the floor, with a knife buried deep in his back. The knife was drawn out and he was dead. And it was discovered that the man was Jacob Bliss, who had accused Deadwood Dick.

Here was more mystery.

Who and what was the woman? Why had she killed Bliss?

The register gave little information—"Mrs. Green and son, Los Angeles, Cal."

It was believed immediately that it was an assumed name, and inquiry and investigation were set on foot immediately.

A call-boy in the hotel had taken a note for Bliss on the previous evening, and he had been seen to enter the hotel at an early hour that morning, evidently in response to it.

The question was, was that woman Deadwood Dick in disguise? Some believed that it was, others that it was not. Deadwood Dick did not stab men in the back, it was argued. When his hand was shown, it would be open and above board; no deception.

The death of Bliss brought forth a brace of fellows who claimed to have been his cousins, and who took charge of his effects.

Days passed, and even that mystery ceased to be talked about.

But a sensation was approaching.

The Gold Ledge National had resumed business, and Coleman had been promoted to the post of cashier.

The mine had not yet been sold, and another pay-day was rolling close to hand. The Murrys held another conference similar to one that we have already witnessed.

"This thing has got to come to a head," said the son, with decision. "It can't go on this way."

"I agree with you, but it is only the postponement of the sale that has baffled us. Had the parties kept to their engagement, all would now be well."

"And as they did not, it is far from well. That old score was all cleared up, and now we have got to open a new one. I tell you, we will keep on till we burn our fingers, and badly, too."

"Can't help it; we have got to tide over this one time, at any rate. I will do it myself without your help, if you are afraid."

"You might, only for the books."

"Ah! I forgot."

"But, it has got to be the last. We are playing with edged tools, and the first thing we know one is going to fly back and give somebody a cut that he won't forget in a hurry."

"This will be the last, not a doubt of it. The sale will no doubt come off, and that will ease up the whole matter and give us a chance to square ourselves and get out."

"It has got to be the last, I tell you, sale or no sale. The murder of Guerdon has not been forgotten, even if it is not so much talked about—"

"Sh! Don't mention that again."

"What I was going to say, there is danger—"

"I tell you that I don't want to hear it. It came near giving us trouble enough when it happened. I only wish I knew where Deadwood Dick is. His silence is trying my nerves."

"And that silver casket—"

"I will not hear of it. I tell you again the thing is accursed, and I wish old Wheaton were alive and had it with him safe in Montana."

"Well, to-night, I suppose."

"Yes, to-night."

They soon ended their talk and left the office.

It had taken place in the office of the mine, if we forgot to make mention the fact.

It was after the clerks had gone for the day, and no one was there to hear what was said, as they supposed, but in this they were mistaken.

They had barely locked the office and proceeded in the direction of the hotel, when a man appeared from behind the safe in the corner of the office, as if rising out of the floor.

He was roughly clad, and wore a heavy beard, but his hair and eyes, now that his face was in natural repose, suggested Deadwood Dick.

"Well, my guess was right," he said. "I will be on hand to-night, too, my fine fellows."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THREE-FOLD ENIGMA SOLVED.

Night, dark as Erebus.

Two men stole forth from the shadows and approached the doors of the Gold Ledge National.

A momentary pause, then the door swung silently open and they entered, closing it softly after them, all the time taking care to make themselves appear as a part of the deeper shadows.

Two or three times the faintest suggestion of a light came through the windows, but it drew no attention. Whoever they were, they were exceedingly careful in the work they were doing. No sound came from within, and finally they emerged as they had entered.

They crept away even more cautiously, if possible, and were lost in the Stygian darkness.

But, they were followed.

After them crept a shadow as silent as they—one that did not for a moment lose sight of them nor yet betray his presence.

By a roundabout way they proceeded to the office of the Gold Ledge Mine, where one of the leaders in the game opened the door and let himself in, the other remaining outside.

A pause; then a light shone dimly from the windows.

Two or three minutes passed; then, of a sudden, a cry of alarm, a disappearing of the light, a hasty step or two, and a body came out through the window, carrying away sash and glass together!

Instantly, as if by magic, a strong light flashed forth, showing up the front of the office almost as light as day; showing Daniel Murray at the step, too amazed to move, and his son on the ground, with a man pinning him by the throat.

All this and more, for at the same moment another actor appeared on the scene. The door opened, and a man of full beard and flashing eyes, roughly clad but of commanding presence, filled the doorway. With clinched right hand, his left came up with index pointing straight at Murray, and in voice of forceful command, he cried:

"Daniel Murray, your bluff game ends right here!"

Murray instinctively reached for a gun, but, presto! a brace of them had leaped to the hands of the man before him!

"No you don't!" said the same calm

voice. "It is my inning this time, and you are my prisoner. Draw that gun, or attempt to do so, and you are a dead man!"

Murray's face was pale, but he was dogged.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "By what right do you attempt to arrest me? Have we not the right to enter our own office at any hour, day or night?"

With a quick motion of one hand the false beard was swept away, and came the answer:

"I am Deadwood Dick, whom once you sought to murder. I do not arrest you for entering your office, but for the murder, years ago, of Mrs. Henry Wheaton—Ha! I thought that shot would wing you, my fine fellow!"

Murray staggered, his face like death, and a sudden perspiration came to his brow.

He might have fallen, but from the direction of the light sprang forward another man, and handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists.

These had the effect to bring him to, and he raged and stormed, but to no purpose. And the same fate fell to his son, who was still on his back on the ground, held there by Horace Jeffries.

Another man carried forward the light, now, the two being aides of the dauntless detective. The prisoners were taken into the office of the mine, and the door was closed upon them. The safe was open, and in it were the funds which had just been taken from the bank.

The man who had the light was George Coleman.

"Look at that money, Coleman," ordered Dick, "and see if you recognize it."

The new cashier did so, and said:

"It is money that was in the safe of the Gold Ledge National at the closing this afternoon."

"Good!" exclaimed Dick. "The money is here, and your books have been so doctored as to make it appear that it has been stolen by you. To-morrow this money would have been deposited to the credit of the Gold Ledge Mine."

The safe was further examined, and in it was found, also, the silver casket deposited in the bank by Henry Wheaton. It evidently had not been opened.

The sheriff was called, together with a justice; charges were properly preferred, and the prisoners were locked up in the jail, under guard.

On the following day they had their hearing, when Deadwood Dick appeared against them, and made such an expose as was the sensation of the hour and created a great furore.

He had taken time to make his case a thorough one against the culprits, and no link was wanting in the chain of evidence. Daniel Murray was shown to be no other than Charles Northton, at whose hands Mrs. Wheaton had met her death, and a confession was forced from him.

The silver casket had been the object he especially desired, for he had come to believe that it contained jewels of immense value. At length he had resolved to steal it and make away with it. He hoped to make it appear that some one else had done the work, so that he might enjoy the fruits of it without anything of the stigma attaching to him.

He was discovered by Mrs. Wheaton, however, and recognized, and, in the dread of the exposure that would follow, he stabbed her and fled, leaving the box in her possession. Wheaton himself was a sound sleeper, and knew nothing of what had taken place until he awoke in the morning. Northton had taken the

money contained in the safe, and with that made good his escape into the far West, where, under his assumed name, he started anew in life.

Naturally, when he saw the silver casket again, he was led to exclaim: "It is fate!" And even after it came into his possession he was afraid to open it, owing to the queer inscription it bore. That, however, had reference to something far in the past, for the box bore evidences of being centuries old.

What the box did contain was diamonds. Wheaton had been gradually turning everything he had into diamonds, and he had carefully weighed all his natural heirs in the balance of his estimation, until he had lit upon young Jeffries as the one to whom he would leave his fortune.

Coming to Gold Ledge, in the course of his wanderings in search of the murderer of his wife, he there met, face to face, with a couple of relations whom he had once before thrown off the track, and who, he rightly believed, intended to murder him for his wealth, which they believed he carried on his person. Eluding them, he deposited the box in the bank and hastened away, but they got on track of him and followed him, and murdered him. These were Jake Bliss and the two who at his death laid claim to his belongings. Guilty himself, Bliss had readily fallen into Murray's scheme of accusing Deadwood Dick of the murder of the cashier, for they all knew they had good reason to fear the matchless rogue-taker. Their scheme was to put him out of the way by lynching.

William Guerdon was shown to have killed himself. There was disclosed a sad chapter in real life. Before her marriage, Mrs. Guerdon had a child, a son, at this time—the time of the murder—fourteen years old. This secret she had ever kept from her husband, afraid to make it known. It came into the possession of Jake Bliss, and he forced her into paying him handsomely for holding his tongue, a trap she was weak enough to fall into. Better to have thrown herself upon her husband's mercy at once and exposed the rascal. But, she did not, but asked her husband for money more often than he could stand. On one or two occasions he took it out of the bank funds, so urgent was her demand upon him; and then, when the Murrys began their stealings, and fixed the books to throw the thefts upon him, he suspected that his wife was the guilty one. He sent for Deadwood Dick to clear the matter up, but on the night before his coming he believed that he had discovered his wife's perfidy, and took his own life.

Just after the suicide, the Murrys entered the bank to steal funds again to deposit on the morrow to meet their pay-day checks. They found the cashier dead, and quickly conceived the scheme of removing the pistol and letting it appear that it had been a case of robbery and murder. This they did.

Murray took also a letter that was found addressed to Guerdon's wife, which he suppressed in order to make the other scheme the more perfect. Mrs. Guerdon, on her part, on the same night, having asked for money and been refused, and knowing that exposure must come, resolved to write out her confession and run away, and did so, leaving it in the hands of the trusted servant, as we have seen.

Later, learning of her husband's act, she returned, lured Jake Bliss to her

room, and there killed him, a sweet revenge after all he had made her suffer.

She was not heard of again in that section, but no doubt is devoting the remainder of her life to her only child.

The Murrys got what they deserved, as did also the others who merited punishment. As for Deadwood Dick, he received the warmest praise for the success he had wrought where, for a time, the maze of mysteries had seemed impenetrable.

THE END.

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OR,

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